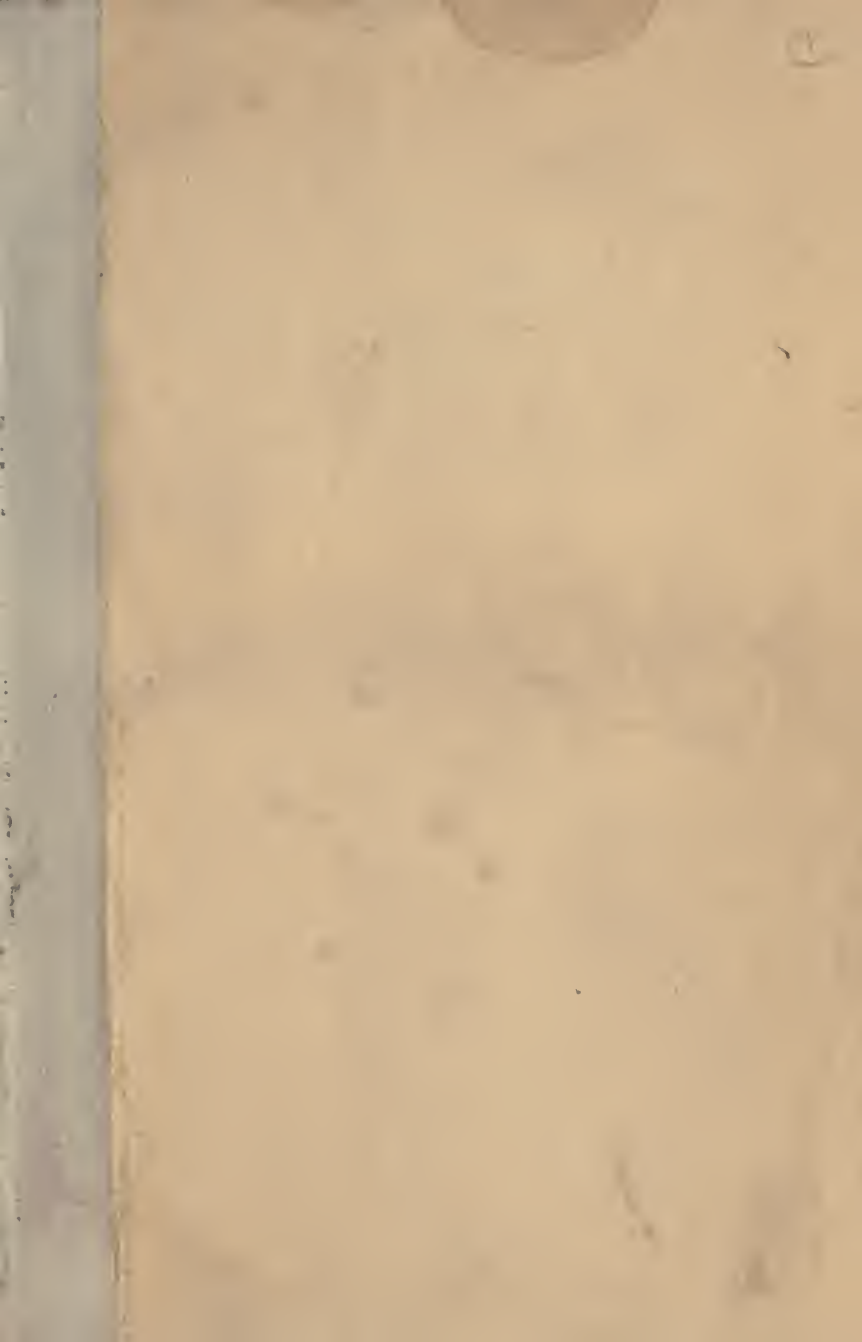


The
GRAND DUCHESS

GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

1. 6



The Grand Duchess

BOOKS BY
GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

THE GRAND DUCHESS
KING TOMMY
SEND FOR DR. O'GRADY
GENERAL JOHN REGAN
THE MAJOR'S NIECE
HYACINTH
BENEDICT KAVANAGH

HODDER & STOUGHTON, LTD.
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The
Grand Duchess

By GEORGE A. BIRMINGHAM

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THE Archimandrite sat waiting.

Men wait, everywhere, every day, in various moods. They wait impatiently for dinner, wearily for trains which are late, angrily for unpunctual friends, nervously for the coming of news, fearfully for the summons to the dentist's torture chamber. The Archimandrite waited with quiet dignity, as befitted a priest and the head of an ancient church. His long, silky black beard was carefully combed. His glossy hair, still black, though he was over fifty, was smoothly brushed back from forehead to neck. His long cassock was without speck or stain. His face was serene.

Yet a certain disorder of person or attire, a sign of nervousness in manner, would have been excusable. The Archimandrite was waiting for the sentence passed on him by a revolutionary court. He had very little doubt what the sentence would be. The manner of his death, by hanging, shooting, guillotining or something still more unpleasant, was

all that remained for him to speculate about.

His lips moved slightly as a priest's do when he mutters his office privately ; but the Archimandrite was not saying prayers. He was composing a Latin hexameter. This was a matter of some difficulty to him, for he belonged to a church with a sacred language of its own, and though he knew Latin he did not know it well. His hexameter, even when he got it to his liking, was not a very good one. An English schoolmaster would have raged over two—at least two—false quantities, one of them so glaring that no Smith minor in a lower form would have been guilty of it. Yet the Archimandrite seemed satisfied ; and it is no doubt a credit to a man to be able to compose a hexameter at all, even a very bad one, when he is waiting for a sentence of death.

All the morning, all the day before and all the day before that, the trial of the Archimandrite had dragged on. It need not have lasted more than half an hour. The case against him was perfectly plain and he made no attempt at defence. He was accused of being a royalist, a reactionary, and engaged in plots for a counter revolution. He did not take the trouble to deny any of the accusations. The trial had been protracted because the judges wanted something more than proof or acknowledgment of the

Archimandrite's guilt. They wanted to find out where the crown of Dravidia was hidden, and they had little doubt that the Archimandrite knew. Up to a certain point their information about the crown was complete and reliable. The night before the mutiny of the Guards, the King and the Archimandrite had taken the brass-bound coffer, in which the crown was kept, from the strong room in the palace and put it somewhere else. The King's valet gave evidence which established that fact. He also made it clear that the King had not afterwards regained possession of the crown.

Next morning, while the Guards, in full mutiny, were cheering the new republic, the King escaped on an ordinary bicycle, the property of his valet. From the moment when he disappeared, pedalling through the back gate of the palace, nothing had been seen or heard of him. It was supposed that he had fallen a victim to the enthusiasm of some band of revolutionaries who, mistaking him for a member of the hated bourgeois class, shot him without knowing the importance of their kill. The only other possibility was that His Majesty was living somewhere in complete obscurity, a very unlikely thing. All the other deposed monarchs in Europe like to keep their titles even if they can keep nothing else. There was no reason to sup-

pose that King Michael of Dravidia was an exceptional man.

But dead or alive the King could not be found, and the Archimandrite was the only man left who knew where the crown was.

The finding of the crown was a matter of the utmost importance to the new rulers of Dravidia. Some of the finest emeralds in the world were set in it, stones which might be sold for immense sums in London, Paris or New York, cities in which the enlightened gospel of communism is not yet accepted. All infant republics want money. So do their rulers, and when those rulers are Jews they are well aware of the value of emeralds. Therefore the President, the three vice-Presidents, the Committee of Public Safety and every one else who could possibly expect to share the loot were anxious to discover where the crown was hidden.

For another reason too, the finding of the crown was of vital importance.

The Dravidians are a very simple people with a limited culture and a few strong beliefs. They hold that the right of government is inherent in the crown itself and passes from it to the man who wears it. To quote the words of the Dravidian Coronation Service, "It is the crown which rules." Loyalty, allegiance, obedience and other civic virtues of the kind, are due to

the actual crown, only incidentally to the wearer. The gentlemen, chiefly Jews, who managed the Dravidian revolution, were not so superstitious as to believe a thing like that, but they were astute enough to realize that their power would be much more easily established and more firmly consolidated if they held possession of the crown. If anyone else got it there might be serious trouble. The King, if he were alive at all, showed no sign of wanting his throne again. But there was a detestable old woman, the Grand Duchess Olga, the aunt of King Michael. If she managed to gain possession of the crown, there would certainly be a royalist movement of a very dangerous kind.

The Grand Duchess Olga escaped just before the revolution, very much to the regret of the leading revolutionaries. She lived as near Dravidia as she dared. It was perfectly well known that she was scheming and plotting. The new Government had agents watching her movements; but there was not really much to be feared from her unless she got the crown.

The search for the lost crown was thorough. The Palace and the Archimandrite's house were ransacked, some of the walls almost pulled down, to find the hiding place. Every large book in both libraries had been dragged from its place. The treasury of the cathedral, a likely enough

spot, was turned inside out. Not a trace of the coffer was discovered ; but the Government felt certain it was still in the country. The King could not have carried it off on his bicycle without the knowledge of the valet who saw him start, and the valet swore repeatedly that the king took no luggage with him, nothing at all except what he carried in his pockets. Since the revolution the frontiers had been very carefully watched and all travellers searched.

The Archimandrite would not confess to knowing anything about the crown. He admitted that he was a loyalist, a reactionary and a plotter ; but neither threats nor promises induced him to speak about the crown. When the trial had lasted two and a half days the judges gave up, sent the Archimandrite back to his cell and sat down to consider what they had better do with him.

The Archimandrite waited, and they kept him waiting for two hours. During that time he composed his hexameter. Then he took off the pectoral cross which hung round his neck, set it down on the table in front of him, and, with the point of his penknife, scratched the words of the hexameter on the back of it.

The Archimandrite's pectoral cross was large and handsome. It looked as if it was made of gold. In fact, it was lead, thinly gilt. The

Archimandrite knew this. So did every member of the revolutionary Government. Being Jews it was natural for them to know all about the value of everything in the country. They knew the history of the Archimandrite's cross, and its gilding never deceived them for a moment. The Archimandrite, who had lived all his life in a country overrun with Jews, felt quite sure that they knew all about his cross. That was why he scratched his hexameter on it. If the cross had been gold, or if any member of the Government had supposed it to be gold, it would certainly have been taken from him. Since it was lead it was not likely that anyone would steal it or take any trouble to find out what happened to it.

When he had finished scratching his hexameter the Archimandrite hung the cross round his neck again, combed his long beard with his fingers, smoothed his hair, flicked a few grains of dust from his cassock and trimmed his finger nails. At last the messenger of the court arrived and announced the sentence.

The Archimandrite was to be confined in the Castle of St. Rackovitz until all danger of royalist plots was passed and the Republic was securely established.

That seemed a very mild sentence. It would, no doubt, be well received when reported in

western European newspapers. It would excite no attention in Dravidia. The Dravidians were whole-hearted about their revolution and most anxious to try the great experiment of Communism, which meant, so they understood, that every man should keep all his own property and be given a bit of his neighbour's as well. But the Dravidians—being as has been said a people of great simplicity—were most religious and they were convinced that ill luck would pursue anyone who killed a priest.

No right-minded English woman will agree to sit down to dinner as one of a party of thirteen. She gives no reasons for her belief that desperate misfortunes will beset her if she does, but, with or without reason, she will put herself to immense trouble and inconvenience rather than take the dreaded risk. In exactly the same way the Dravidians shuddered at the idea of executing an Archimandrite. They could not have said precisely why, but they were quite sure that awful things would occur in a country where such a crime was committed. The judge and revolutionary leaders knew all about the religion of the Dravidians. Therefore they were careful not to announce a death sentence.

If they could have found the crown and put it on exhibition publicly, they might have ventured to execute the Archimandrite. The Dra-

vidians' belief in the sacredness of priests was strong, but their faith in the crown was stronger still. An Archimandrite had once been beheaded in Dravidia, early in the eighteenth century, and no particular ill-feeling was aroused. But the King had stood near the scaffold with the crown on his head. That was exactly what the revolutionary leaders could not do. Therefore they hesitated about announcing a death sentence.

The Archimandrite was not in the least deceived by this show of clemency. He knew the castle of St. Rackovitz, a grim pile in a lonely place. And he did not think that he would live there for a single hour if the revolutionary leaders found the crown.

After hearing his sentence he petitioned that he might see his chaplain. The request was granted, because the judges thought it likely that he would confide the secret of the hiding place of the crown to the chaplain. This was exactly what the Archimandrite intended to do.

He was led from his cell to a large room, which had originally been the audience chamber of the King. There he found his chaplain, a young priest, who immediately fell on his knees and craved the Archimandrite's blessing. He got it. He got several other blessings too. The Archimandrite was lavish with them. He sent one to each of the principal clergy. He sent several

to faithful people. He sent a particularly copious one to the Grand Duchess Olga, the King's aunt. While giving this last blessing he took off his pectoral cross, kissed it twice in a most affecting way, and hung it round the young priest's neck.

That was all he said or did, which was a great disappointment to the head of the revolutionary police who stood behind a screen and listened to every word that the Archimandrite spoke. The mention of the Grand Duchess Olga had awakened this officer's hopes, but though the blessing sent her was particularly copious there was not a word in it about the crown or a phrase which could be supposed to refer to the hiding place.

Yet the Archimandrite had sent the Grand Duchess the secret. He felt confident that his chaplain, a very faithful fellow, would examine the pectoral cross, find the hexameter and understand that it was meant for the Grand Duchess. There was, of course, the risk that some revolutionary officer might also take into his head to examine the cross. Even if that happened the Archimandrite felt fairly safe. His hexameter was very cunningly composed. He was sure that no revolutionary would understand what it meant. He was perfectly right there. Not that day, but about six weeks later the hexameter was very carefully studied by one

of the cleverest men in the revolutionary party. He could not understand it. Unfortunately the Grand Duchess Olga could not understand it either. Nor could Dermot Drelincourt Roche, though he was a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and knew all there was to know about the Latin language. The Archimandrite had hidden his meaning rather more effectively than he meant to.



CHAPTER I

IN Budapest there is an hotel with two names. Because the Hungarians are a very patriotic people and have a language of their own it is called the *Duna Palota Szalloda*, which means the Danube Palace Hotel. Because it is chiefly used by strangers from other countries it is also called the Ritz, which is a name associated with first-rate hotels all over the world.

It is a first-rate hotel, the most comfortable in Budapest, perhaps as comfortable as any in Europe. The food is excellent. The rooms are spacious. There is an abundance of baths. The servants come when bells are rung—a very rare virtue in hotel servants. This is high praise. But no tourist must be misled into deciding to go to Budapest with a view to staying at the Ritz. He may go to Budapest, but it is most unlikely that he will get a room in the Ritz if he is nothing more than an ordinary

tourist. Even if he is a wealthy American he will not be accommodated there.

Bedrooms in the Ritz are to be let, for those who occupy them pay rents. But they are not to be let to every one who applies for them. Diplomats can get rooms there, if they are in the service of respectable countries like England, France, Belgium or the United States. A diplomat from one of the new Balkan States is not admitted. Grand Dukes and Grand Duchesses, the floating wreckage of foundered royal houses, live in the Ritz for months at a time. Even ordinary dukes and duchesses—plain, not Grand—can have rooms. Financiers, supposed to be able to negotiate loans for the Hungarian Government, are put up in the Ritz. The Government sees to that. So are the agents of the great charitable organizations which spend English and American money in Budapest. The Government, eager to encourage this form of Christian endeavour, looks after them too. The friends and relations of diplomats, Grand Dukes, ordinary dukes, benevolent financiers and charitable secretaries can get into the Ritz if strong influence is used on their behalf.

If there are any rooms left after all these people are satisfied they are given to very rich Jews. These are the cream of the “Schieber” or profiteer class. Like vultures round a carcass

they gather together wherever a currency is falling. They were to be met in Vienna when the Austrian crown was being whirled down the rapids, in Berlin when the mark was multiplying itself faster than the aphides do, in Budapest when the Hungarian crown took the bit between its teeth and galloped down a very steep hill. The same faces, greedy, sensual, acute, Semitic, were to be seen in the Adlon in Berlin, in the Bristol in Vienna, in the Ritz in Budapest. They get in there by lavishly bribing the clerks at the reception desk. But their tenure of their rooms is insecure. The richest Jew will be turned out of the Ritz, if the Government wants his room, or if a diplomat wants it, or even if a Grand Duke wants it. The Jew may grumble, or bribe, or offer to pay twice the price of the room, but he will not be able to keep it.

That was what happened when Mr. Roche, Dermot Drelincourt Roche, came to Budapest. Mr. Otto Kuhn, a very wealthy gentleman who had spent millions—of Hungarian crowns—in securing his room, was turned out and had to seek accommodation elsewhere. With the patience of his race he bore this indignity without railing, although Roche was neither a diplomat, a Grand Duke, nor a member of the League of Nations, but merely a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin. That is a very good

and honourable thing to be, and in Dublin it is very much esteemed. But in itself a fellowship of Trinity College, Dublin, would not entitle a man to a room in the Ritz. Roché got that—or rather the Hungarian Government got it for him—because he was a delegate of the Impoverished Professors' Relief Society.

Everybody knows, or ought to know, that learned men, especially University professors, starve in countries where the currency is heavily depreciated. Having incomes of the kind which some humorist called "fixed" they find themselves trying to live on what amounts to about £1 a month. Everybody else in this position goes on strike and gets more wages. The professors have too much sense to strike. They know that nobody would be in the least inconvenienced if they did.

A society was formed in England to help these unfortunate people. A good deal of money was collected. Three gentlemen, themselves belonging to the University Don class, were sent out to see how the funds could best be administered. The Oxford man went to Germany. The Cambridge man went to Austria. Dermot Drelincourt Roche, from Dublin, took Hungary. The Hungarian Government, laudably anxious to secure a living wage for their professors without having to put their own

Treasury to any expense, gave Roche a cordial welcome. A dapper Secretary of State showed him all he ought to see. Luncheon parties were given in his honour, and a room was commandeered for him at the Ritz.

Roche spent a week among the impoverished professors and was duly impressed. After sitting next him at one of the luncheon parties it was impossible not to believe that a mathematician of European reputation was really hungry. The man ate more in an hour than Roche would have believed possible. A Sanskrit scholar, who also knew and taught eight modern Asiatic languages, owned only one pair of boots which he shared with his wife and two daughters. A professor of comparative ethnology was a shade better off than his fellows, for he had secured a post as clerk in the *Mittel Europäische Bank und Wechsel Stube*, a business owned by Otto Kuhn, one of the new banks which had sprung up like mushrooms in Budapest since the money lost its value. It is an odd fact, little discussed by political economists, that the less value money has the more banks increase and flourish. The comparative ethnologist spent his days adding up columns of figures, which is dull work, but he earned just enough to buy his dinner every day and to have a slice of bread for breakfast. The professor was not obliged to give up

entirely his study of comparative ethnology. The staff of the bank was small. He came into contact with his chief every day, and Otto Kuhn was by birth a Silesian Jew, by citizenship and education a Dravidian. The professor had ample opportunities of comparing him with other people.

Roche, though lavishly entertained in the middle of the day, was left very much to himself in the evenings. He had a little table in a corner of the dining-room in the Ritz. For a time he was quite satisfied and content. He liked listening to the band, one of those Tzigany bands which are immensely admired by those who spend three days in Budapest, tolerated by those who stay for a week, cursed with extraordinary bitterness by any unhappy stranger who has to listen to them for a month. He liked looking round the assembled company of diners. The restaurant in the Ritz—unlike the upper stories where the bedrooms are—is not exclusive. Anyone who has money enough to pay for his dinner may go there. All sorts of people do go, except the Hungarian upper classes, who are not fond of mixing with strangers and seldom have money enough to pay the prices asked at the Ritz.

Diplomats have little tables reserved for them. So have Grand Dukes. So have the people who are in Budapest as members of "missions,"

military, political or charitable. The rest of the tables are occupied by obviously opulent Jews and by very pretty ladies with highly painted faces, who are there to be entertained by anyone—diplomat, Grand Duke, philanthropist, political agent or Jew, who is willing to entertain them. These ladies prefer Jews, though fat ; because Jews, especially if fat, have more money than any of the others.

The scene was an amusing one to watch ; but after awhile Roche got tired of watching it. He was an Irishman, born and bred in Dublin, therefore he felt more than most men do the need of talking. An Englishman—anyone who has ever been a member of a London club knows this—can sit for hours day after day without speaking and be quite happy. A Dubliner is differently made. It is not that, like Alexander Selkirk, he yearns “to hear the soft music of speech.” He wants to make it, and unless he can do that he is as uncomfortable as a smoker deprived of tobacco.

But diplomats are shy people. So are Grand Dukes. None of them took any notice of Roche or gave him the smallest chance of making a friendly remark about the weather or the Danube. The Jews herded together in noisy groups and seemed no more anxious to associate with the Christians than the Christians were to

associate with them. Only the ladies with the beautifully painted faces took any notice of Roche. Those of them who were at the moment disengaged looked at him with slow appraising eyes, which made him feel uncomfortable, or with cool glances of invitation which made him more uncomfortable still. Roche, viewing their dresses and their jewellery, felt sure that these ladies would be very expensive indeed, even more expensive than the *fogas*, a fresh-water fish of inferior flavour, which the waiters pressed on him every night.

In the end, perhaps, driven by sheer loneliness, he might have risked bankruptcy and invited one of these ladies to dine with him. He was saved from this in a very unexpected way.

At a small table in a corner sat an old lady who would have been insignificant if she had not been very badly dressed and grotesquely ugly. She always wore a rusty black gown apparently made by an unskilful dressmaker in imitation of a fashion twenty years old. On her feet she had broad, low-heeled, elastic-sided boots. On her head she had a shapeless black bonnet. Yet on her fingers she wore rings which even the jewelled ladies with the painted faces turned to stare at, and round her neck was a long string of immense amber beads, mellowed to that shade of tawny

orange which only very old amber attains. Her face was crooked. Owing to the slackening or shrinking of some muscle her left cheek had been caught up towards the eyebrow above it and had dragged half the upper lip after it.

This was the Grand Duchess Olga of Dravida.

She, like her humbler sisters of the painted faces, was interested in Roche. She stared at him even more than they did. She sent him, just as they did, glances of invitation. She evidently wanted him to speak to her, to sit down beside her, to join her at dinner. Roche could not guess why.

Budapest, like Dublin, is a whispering gallery of gossip. Before a stranger has been there three days everything there is to know about him is known, generally wrong. Before he leaves it has all been repeated a hundred times, even more wrong than at first. The Grand Duchess heard who Roche was and what he was doing before he had dined three times in the Ritz. She was not interested in Hungarian Professors and would not have cared in the least if the whole class had starved to death. But she was interested in the fact that Roche was a scholar and a distinguished member of an ancient University. She believed him to be the head of the

university and a very profound scholar. He was neither, but she was near enough being right, nearer than people who rely on gossip usually are.

Like every one else in eastern Europe the Grand Duchess Olga had a complete and well-founded distrust of everybody who lives east of Vienna and an almost childlike faith in the honour and honesty of Englishmen. If she had known Roche was Irish her confidence in his integrity would have been greater still. For Ireland lies west of England, and according to her theory men become more and more honest the further west you go, until you get to the Atlantic. After that—well, after that you come to America. And the Americans, since President Wilson preached his gospel, are rather distrusted in eastern Europe.

The Grand Duchess wanted the help of a scholar for she could not translate the hexameter on the back of the Archimandrite's pectoral cross. But she wanted the help of an absolutely honourable and trustworthy scholar because she suspected that the hexameter contained the secret of the hiding place of the Dravidian crown. No Hungarian or other eastern European could possibly be allowed to get a hint of that. Therefore she was interested in Roche and threw him glances of invitation which might easily have

been misinterpreted had she been a younger woman or less absurdly ugly.

Roche, who did not know who she was and was greatly puzzled by her behaviour, made no response of any kind. The Grand Duchess tried a more direct method.

The head waiter stepped up behind Roche's chair one evening after he had finished dinner and spoke close to his ear in a most confidential tone.

"Please, the Grand Duchess has need of a conference."

Roche was scarcely surprised. Every one in Europe at that time seemed to be in constant and pressing need of conferences. If Prime Ministers, Ambassadors, Kings, Generals, Admirals and all financial experts desire conferences with a kind of insatiable hunger, it was likely enough that a Grand Duchess—a lady sure to be in the full stream of fashion—would need one too. The only thing which astonished Roche was that she should have sent the head waiter to tell him so.

"With you," said the head waiter, in a reverential whisper.

This time Roche was very greatly surprised. He knew no Grand Duchess. He did not even know exactly what a Grand Duchess is or how she differs from others of her kind. He could

imagine no reason why any Grand Duchess should want to confer with him.

A perfectly simple explanation of the puzzle occurred to him at once. The head waiter had delivered the message to the wrong man.

"There's evidently a mistake," he said genially. "You're mixing me up with some one else."

He looked round as he spoke and saw at a neighbouring table an officer in a very splendid uniform, the breast of his tunic covered with medals, just the sort of man with whom a Grand Duchess might naturally wish to confer.

"I expect it's that gorgeous swash-buckler she wants," he said, "or——" He caught sight of a tall man with a pointed moustache, exquisitely dressed, "or that ambassador. He looks as if he would make up a first-rate conference all by himself. Take him, or take both of them if you think the Grand Duchess wants two."

"But please," said the head waiter, "the Grand Duchess said the English professor."

"If she said that," said Roche, "I suppose she must have meant me, though I'm not exactly a professor and certainly not English. After all we've been through in Ireland during the last

five years, murdering and burning and robbing each other simply in order to prove that we're not English, it's rather unpleasant to have that sort of thing said. The Grand Duchess ought to be better informed. It's the duty of a lady in her position to keep up with the main stream of European politics. It's a disgrace for her to think an Irishman is English."

The head waiter smiled deferentially. He had not the least idea what Roche was talking about, for his knowledge of English was very slight. He could translate a menu card fluently. He could deliver a simple message. He could understand—though he generally pretended he could not—when anybody complained that the soup was cold. But Roche's speech on Irish politics was beyond him.

"With you," he repeated mildly, "a little conference."

"I detest all conferences," said Roche, "big or little."

He was greatly pleased at being in a position to talk again, and did not care whether the head waiter understood him or not. A gentleman at one of the nearer tables did understand. Roche could see that he was listening with interest, a very encouraging thing to any talker. This listener was the Otto Kuhn whose room Roche had taken. He was dining with the prettiest

and most painted of all the pretty ladies. Roche raising his voice slightly for the benefit of his listener, went on :

“Nasty talky things, conferences,” he said. “Always full of people with grievances who make speeches and can’t be stopped. A quiet, sensible man like me never manages to get a word in, even sideways. That’s why I never go to conferences and don’t mean to until the things are reformed in such a way that I get a fair chance of saying what I want to and the other people are made to dry up.”

The head waiter, who was always a busy man at dinner time, began to get tired of listening to Roche. He took a firm line.

“The Highness,” he said, “says you come.”

He laid his hand on the back of Roche’s chair as if he meant to pull it away.

“Very well,” said Roche, “if it’s a royal command I suppose I must, though mind you I think there’s a great deal to be said for republicans. They loot of course ; but so do the other fellows, and neither party is what I’d call loyal. Still, your Grand Duchess evidently thinks she has a right to issue orders to perfect strangers as if they were servants. That’s ridiculous, of course. She can’t do it. But if she thinks she can I’m the last man to wish to upset

her cherished beliefs merely because I don't share them. So——"

He rose as he spoke, and the head waiter pulled his chair away at once. Then, with a dignified gesture, he waved him towards the door of the dining-room. Roche allowed himself to be shepherded into a large ante-room and was handed over to a page-boy in a brown linen jacket.

The page-boy took him to the lift, conducted him up to the first floor, and handed him over to a swarthy man-servant with an immensely thick moustache. This man was dressed in a mauve-coloured tunic and tight breeches sewn over with broad violet braid. His tunic had rows of silver buttons on it, the size and shape of large cherries, and each button had a crown impressed on it. Roche guessed that this man was a private servant of the Grand Duchess and that she lived in considerable state. The man led him into a small ante-room. He tapped at an inner door. A young woman, opening the door as little as possible, sidled out. This was the Grand Duchess' maid, but she was not nearly so splendidly dressed as the footman. Her skirt was far from clean. Her blouse was worn through at the elbows. She had no stockings, and wore a pair of heelless slippers instead of shoes.

The maid and the footman held a long conversation in a strange tongue. Then the inner door was opened and Roche was invited to enter. The maid slipped in after him and took her place in a corner. There she resumed the work of darning the Grand Duchess' stockings. Roche's arrival had interrupted her.

CHAPTER II

THE old lady sat huddled up in an arm-chair far too big for her and looked even uglier than she did in the dining-room downstairs. She had taken off her rusty bonnet and the meagreness of her grey hair was noticeable. Her stockingless maid had not even made the most of the few locks which remained. They were so ill-arranged that patches of bald skull were plainly to be seen. Her hands, still covered with magnificent rings, were not clean and her finger nails were actually grimy.

She stretched out her right hand to Roche as he approached her. Having watched many gentlemen greeting many ladies in the dining-room, he knew what he ought to do. He ought to put his heels together, bow from the hips,

and kiss the hand offered to him. A little dirt on the knuckles and nails of the hand would not have stopped him. He was not a fastidious young man. But being an Irishman, and therefore more self-conscious than even an Englishman is he had a horror of making a fool of himself. Rather to the surprise of the Grand Duchess he shook her hand heartily and sat down on the chair beside her.

This is not the way to behave in the presence of royal personages and the Grand Duchess might very well have been annoyed. But she was a lady of wide experience of the world, having lived in most parts of Europe and several towns in Asia Minor, as well as in Dravidia before the revolution. She spoke to Roche without a sign of outraged dignity.

"I hope," she said, "that you like Budapest and are comfortable in this hotel."

Roche said that Budapest was a remarkably interesting city and that he found the hotel excellent.

"At all events," said the Grand Duchess, "there are no bugs in the beds. My God! if you saw the bugs in some of the other hotels!"

Roche sat up with a start. The insect of which the Grand Duchess spoke is one which no Irish lady, probably no English lady, would

name in a whisper even to a hospital nurse. He did not know that since democracy tried its short-lived experiment of communism in Budapest it is necessary to speak frequently and plainly about bugs. They play a large part in domestic life and have done much to confirm the Hungarians in their belief that a world made safe for democracy would be exceedingly unpleasant to live in.

"As it happens," said Roche, "I have a tin of Keating's Powder in my suitcase. Somebody advised me to bring it with me when I came to these parts. If you think it would be any use to you I will send it up to you with the greatest pleasure. It's said to be perfectly harmless for domestic animals, so if you happen to have a dog, or——"

He looked round, half expecting to see a black cat perched on the Grand Duchess' shoulder. She looked so like a witch in a child's picture book that there ought to have been a black cat somewhere.

The Grand Duchess took no notice of this offer. Her attention was distracted by an unfortunate accident. The stockingless maid, moving her elbow incautiously, tipped off the table beside her a basket containing the Grand Duchess's undarned stockings and several other garments. The maid was down on her knees in

a moment, but she did not escape a scolding from the Grand Duchess. Roche did not understand the language which was used, but he felt certain that the old lady was swearing. When she had reduced the maid to tears she turned to Roche in a perfectly friendly manner.

"These damned idiots," she said, "need whipping every day."

"The question of the value of corporal punishment," said Roche, "is one which is very often discussed, and——"

If the subject of the Grand Duchess's conference was to be whipping Roche felt that he had a good deal to say and that it would be a pleasure to say it. The Grand Duchess interrupted him.

"You are," she said, "a learned scholar, a man of honour and very chivalrous."

"Certainly," said Roche. "You're perfectly right. I'm all that, but how did you know?"

That he should have a reputation for learning did not surprise him much. He had come to Budapest to help impoverished professors, and it was natural to suppose that he took some interest in scholarship. But he had not, so far as he could remember, said or done anything which would lead people to think of him as a man of honour or chivalry.

"Ah," said the Grand Duchess. "I have

lived in Constantinople and in Asia. I have learned the wisdom of the East."

She huddled herself up in her chair as she spoke, grasped her amber necklace in both hands and pressed the great beads to her cheeks.

"The amber tells me," she said, "what men are. It has told me that you are of stainless honour and of chivalry."

Roche watched her. She was slowly rubbing the smooth amber beads up and down her cheeks and pressing them to her lips. Being a fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, he was, of course, a man of sceptical mind, and he held everything psychic in contempt. But he was mildly interested in the eccentricities of the human mind.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that information of that kind comes to you out of those beads of yours?"

"Out of very old amber comes knowledge of men's hearts," said the Grand Duchess. "If you were a dirty dog like those Jews downstairs I should know it at once. My amber would feel grey to me when I laid it to my face. But I find it yellow when I look at you. Therefore I know that you are a man of honour."

"As a matter of fact I am," said Roche.

"You couldn't find anyone with a higher idea of honour than I have, but I don't profess to understand how your beads know all about me."

"And you are chivalrous."

"I'm that too," said Roche. "Every Irishman is, though you mightn't think it if you read the newspapers."

"Therefore," said the Grand Duchess, "I am sure you will help me."

Roche said he would, and once more offered his tin of Keating's Powder. But that was not what the Grand Duchess wanted. She dropped her amber necklace and waved his offer away with an expressive gesture of both hands. Roche was left with the impression that she wanted his help in a matter far more important than the slaughter of insects. Bugs might eat her alive, might eat her maid, might even eat the gorgeous footman—she was still waving her hands—and all that would be of no importance compared to the business in which she wanted help. Roche at once made up his mind that she intended to ask him for money.

His experience in Budapest had taught him that almost everybody wants money and that nobody is in the least ashamed to ask for it. It was perhaps a little startling to be appealed

to by a Grand Duchess, but she would no doubt say that she wanted the money for the intellectual classes in Dravidia. That sort of appeal is quite permissible to ladies of the highest classes, and if they succeed in intercepting some of the resulting flow of charitable gold—Roche, who was by no means a fool, knew that such things happen almost everywhere.

“The society which I represent,” he began, “exists for the purpose of giving help to the intellectual classes who are suffering from the depreciated condition of the currencies of central and eastern Europe. To these intellectuals——”

“The intellectuals,” said the Grand Duchess, “are cursed fools everywhere.”

Roche had no very high opinion of the intelligence of the intellectual classes. But he was startled by the vigour of the Grand Duchess’s denunciation.

“Besides,” she said, “there are no intellectuals in Dravidia.”

Roche gasped. This was something quite new in his experience. Every one else he met in central Europe claimed for his country that it was the home of culture, deep and ancient, and desired nothing better than to live amid daily performances of Mr. Shaw’s plays, if only some one would provide salaries to live on while the

performances were going on. He had got rather tired of this pose, and once he got over the first shock was inclined to welcome the Grand Duchess's frankness.

"Between ourselves," he said, "and speaking quite unofficially, Dravidia must be an extremely pleasant country to live in. I'm the delegate of a society which exists for the purpose of keeping intellectual people alive, so of course I can't say much. But if I didn't happen to be in that exact position I should say that we'd all be a great deal happier if every high-brow in Europe—and America: the American high-brow is even worse than the European variety—if every single one of them was dead and buried—decently buried, with tombstones and inscriptions recording their virtues."

Instead of arguing with Roche about the value of culture or agreeing with him that a massacre of intellectuals was desirable, the Grand Duchess grasped a thick black ribbon which was round her neck, and tugged at it much as a fisherman tugs at the rope attached to the anchor of his boat. From some unguessable depths of her clothing she hauled up a large cross—the pectoral cross of the Archimandrite of Dravidia.

It was a very large cross, far too large to

be worn comfortably, as apparently the Grand Duchess wore it, next the skin. It had eight hard points and long sharp edges. Roche, not unnaturally, thought that this remarkable old lady wore it for the mortification of the flesh, as certain saints wear, or used to wear, hair shirts. Such a practice marked her as a woman of fanatical piety.

"No doubt," said the Grand Duchess, "you can read Latin."

"I can," said Roche, "fluently, easily and almost without effort."

"I wish to God I could," said the Grand Duchess. "I shouldn't have to ask you to help me if I knew Latin myself."

"I may say without boasting," said Roche, "that I can read and translate any Latin ever written, classical, ecclesiastical, medical, even the sort written by undergraduates, which is the least intelligible there is."

The Grand Duchess turned the cross over so that the back of it was uppermost, and handed it to Roche. He read the Archimandrite's hexameter.

"Si vis coronam saligia prima petenda."

"'If you wish for a crown,'" Roche began fluently, "'you must first seek for . . .'"

There he paused, for a very good reason. He did not know the meaning of the word

"Saligia." The Grand Duchess waited, eagerly expectant.

"Yes," she said, "if you wish to find the crown you must seek for it first . . ."

Roche, worried by the word Saligia, did not notice that she had given a twist to the translation which he offered her.

"My God," said the Grand Duchess impatiently, "why can't you tell me where to search for it?"

Having boasted that he could read any Latin ever written Roche did not want to confess himself beaten. But he had never seen the word Saligia before, or anything like it. He carried the cross over to the lamp which stood on the table, beside which the maid was still darning stockings. The Grand Duchess followed him and kicked her maid vigorously because she was in the way. The poor girl slunk off to another corner of the room moaning faintly, though she was not in the least hurt. The Grand Duchess's boots were soft and thin soled.

Roche, with the Grand Duchess leaning over his shoulder, bent down and peered at the cross in the strong light of the lamp. He could make nothing out of Saligia but what it was, SALIGIA. All he discovered by his scrutiny was a circumflex accent over the second a. That annoyed

him a little. The first a in Saligia ought by all the rules of prosody to be short. The writer of the hexameter treated it as long. The circumflex accent made the second a long. But if the verse was to scan at all that syllable must be short. Men who make two false quantities in one line have no business to write Latin verse.

“ Yes! Yes,” said the Grand Duchess. “ But where, where are we to seek ? Why don’t you speak ? ”

Roche had been brought up by pious parents. Over the cot in his nursery there used to hang a gaily illuminated motto on a large blue card. “ No cross, no crown.” The recollection of this came to him as he stared at the Archimandrite’s inscription, and he saw, or thought he saw, what the Latin inscription must mean. The words were scrawled on the back of a cross. They were therefore obviously religious. The “ crown ” was the heavenly reward promised by his nursery text to those who endured hardship. Here the matter was approached from a different side and the crown was promised to those who sought, or pursued something, plainly a virtue. Of course it must be a virtue. Heavenly crowns are given to none but those who achieve virtue of some kind. The only question which remained to be

answered was, what virtue? Saligia was not to be translated by faith, hope, charity, or anything else familiar.

"If you desire the crown of life——" Roche began again.

"Crown of life?" said the Grand Duchess doubtfully.

"It doesn't exactly say 'crown of life,'" said Roche. "It simply says 'crown,' though of course crown of life is what is meant. If you desire a crown you must above all else seek virtue."

"Virtue?" said the Grand Duchess. "But it cannot possibly say virtue."

"It does," said Roche. "If you think it over you'll see that it couldn't possibly say anything else. But I confess that I don't know exactly which virtue the writer has in mind. However, that doesn't matter much. What he evidently means is that you must go in for virtue in general if you want a crown. See?"

"That's simply nonsense," said the Grand Duchess.

"No, it's not," said Roche. "Any clergyman in the world, no matter what church he belongs to, will tell you the same thing. No virtue, no crown. That's what it says, put into four words."

The Grand Duchess was wizened, ugly, shabbily dressed, not very clean. She had practised magic in Constantinople and Asia Minor. She believed that her amber beads talked to her. But she was not altogether a fool. She realized that there was some word in the inscription which puzzled Roche, which, in fact, he could not translate.

"That inscription," she said, "does not mean what you say, not at all."

"Then I wish," said Roche a little irritably, "that you'd get those beads of yours to tell you what it does mean. If they can give you all kinds of miscellaneous information about me—perfectly correct and reliable information, about my honour and chivalry and scholarship and so forth—if they can do all that they must surely be able to translate a Latin word like *Saligia*."

"*Saligia*," said the Grand Duchess.

"Exactly," said Roche. "That's the word that's stuck me, though I'm perfectly certain it means a virtue of some kind. Just ask your beads, will you? Rub them up and down a bit to get them warm, and then squeeze them against your face. They'll be able to tell you."

But the Grand Duchess did not think so. Like all believers in information obtained from

planchettes, crystals, packs of cards and other psychic instruments, she shrank from putting her faith to a certain kind of test. No medium can ever be got to name a Derby winner three days before the race or to prophesy a week ahead the price of a speculative share on the Stock Exchange. The Grand Duchess's amber beads told her many interesting things, but she would not ask them the meaning of Saligia.

"Do you think," she said, "that you could find the word in a dictionary?"

"I suppose so," said Roche, "but I should need a very good dictionary, and I haven't got one."

"There must be a good Latin dictionary somewhere in Budapest," said the Grand Duchess.

That seemed likely. The city possesses an enormous university, several learned societies, an immense number of professors, and is very proud of what it calls its culture. There must be somewhere in it a first-rate Latin dictionary.

"Very well," said Roche, "I'll go to-morrow morning and hunt about for a dictionary. I'll look out Saligia, and when I find what it means I'll tell you. I'm perfectly certain it's a virtue of some sort, and my private belief is——"

There he hesitated. His private belief was that if the inscription were meant specially for the edification of the Grand Duchess it probably recommended some virtue like patience. A lady who kicks her maid, swears violently even when unprovoked and gives way to sudden fits of extreme irritation, cannot expect a heavenly crown unless she reforms her ways. But he did not like to say all that plainly. After all, a Grand Duchess, though ugly and shabby, is still a great lady, indeed a royal personage. A man does not speak the naked truth to such people unless he is a missionary and wants to be a martyr.

"Don't you see," he said, "that an inscription on the back of a cross must be about a virtue? Well, you will see it as soon as ever I find out what virtue Saligia means. Then you can start practising it hard and make sure of your crown."

"That," said the Grand Duchess, "is what I want. The crown."

"And I'll put you in the way of getting it," said Roche, "as soon as ever I can lay my hands on a dictionary."

CHAPTER III

THE *Mittel Europäische Bank und Wechsel Stube* is in a narrow street not far from the Ritz Hotel. An Englishman would have difficulty in recognizing it as a bank at all. To an Irishman, accustomed to the dignity of the Bank of Ireland in College Green, Otto Kuhn's establishment seems more like a small second-rate shop. That, indeed, is what it was a year ago.

A Christian, one of the very few Christian shopkeepers in Budapest, sold gloves there. Being a Christian he was unable to adapt himself to a currency which changed its value every day. He therefore failed. Otto Kuhn, a Jew with the instincts of his race and considerable experience of unstable currencies in Vienna and Berlin, turned the glove shop into a bank.

He wasted no money on show. He left the shop window exactly as it was when gloves were displayed in it, not even painting the glass or putting a blind inside. The passer-by, if curious, could look through the window and see the staff of the bank at work. Inside there had been no unnecessary expense on fitting. The counter of the glove seller was removed, but his shelves, once full of gloves, still covered one wall, and were stacked with papers. Near

the window was a desk at which Paula Marcovici sat with a typewriter in front of her. She was the daughter of a General who had served his country well in the war. She was pallid, flabby and very poorly dressed. She hoped that in three months she would be able to buy a new pair of shoes if she saved up all the wages Otto Kuhn paid her.

Opposite her, at a plain deal table, sat Hermann Weisz, Ph.D., professor of comparative ethnology. He spent his day copying, adding up, arranging and entering in ledgers immense columns of figures.

At the back of the room, near a huge stove, Otto Kuhn sat at a broad roll-top desk. He had a cigar in his mouth and his face wore an expression of bland cunning. Here he played the same tricks with the Hungarian currency which he had played before in Vienna and Berlin. The stove beside his desk was his only business extravagance. It was very large, very efficient, and was kept burning at full strength all day. Otto Kuhn liked heat. He would have done his business in the inner chamber of a Turkish Bath had that been possible. He achieved a temperature in his office which would have been creditable to any Turkish Bath.

Naturalists tell us that wild animals have a wonderful power of adapting themselves to their

surroundings. The stripes of the tiger, which lives in brown and yellow jungles, are quoted as an instance of this. Sometimes, we may perhaps suppose, this power is prophetic, and animals adapt themselves in advance to the conditions under which they are going to live at some future time. Otto Kuhn, after years in the temperature of his various offices, will suffer little inconvenience when he finally settles down in hell.

Roche, breezy and cheerful after a good night's sleep and a sharp walk, pushed open the door of the *Mittel Europäische Bank*. He was met with a blast of heat so fierce that he very nearly shut the door again—from the outside. But Roche is not easily daunted. Anyone who has survived the last four years in Ireland is tough ; and he wanted to speak to the professor of comparative ethnology. He had seen Dr. Weisz through the window, so he knew he had come to the right place.

“ Good morning, professor,” he said. “ Can I have a word with you ? ”

The professor looked inquiringly at his employer. Otto Kuhn stood up behind his desk and looked at Roche. He had bought the time and energy of the professor for eight hours every day and he did not think it fair that a stranger should step in and use his property.

The shady Jewish financier is very little troubled with beliefs of any kind, but he suffers from one curious superstition. He is convinced that every one who speaks English is rich, carries a cheque book in his pocket and can be induced without difficulty to part with large sums of money. With this idea in his mind Otto Kuhn smiled at Roche.

Roche shook hands with the professor, took off his hat to Paula Marcovici, and nodded to Otto Kuhn.

"I won't keep you a minute, Professor," he said, "for I can see you're busy. All I want you to do is to tell me where I can find a first-rate Latin dictionary, the largest you know of in Budapest."

The Professor twittered. He was startled by this very unusual request, and he was too nervous to be coherent. The price of bread had risen suddenly that morning, and he had been unable to afford the slice of *schwarz Brod* on which he usually breakfasted. It was only after Roche had repeated his request that the professor managed to say something about libraries in the university and the Academy of Science.

"Will you be so very good," said Roche, "as to give me notes of introduction to the two librarians. All you need say is that I'm a

respectable man and that I haven't come to Budapest to steal dictionaries."

The professor looked to his master for permission. In order to do what Roche wanted he would have to use some of the time, perhaps five minutes, which belonged to Otto Kuhn. He must also take a piece of paper—Otto Kuhn's paper, some ink—Otto Kuhn's ink, and shorten the life of the nib which he used by writing with it what would be of no service to Otto Kuhn. The professor, it will be seen, had learnt something of the spirit of business as conducted in the *Mittel Europäische Bank*.

Otto Kuhn recognized Roche soon after he came into the office. He knew that it was for Roche's sake that he had been turned out of his room at the Ritz. He bore no ill will at all on that account. Indeed, that inclined him to think of Roche as a desirable acquaintance. He also remembered that Roche was the man who had been summoned to the presence of the Grand Duchess Olga the night before. While dining at the Ritz in company with a lady, he had seen the head waiter deliver a message, and had heard all that Roche said in reply. Roche, who had no secrets, always spoke loudly and distinctly. Otto Kuhn was interested, as all intelligent people are, in royal ladies and the friends whom they choose to honour. He

was for various reasons particularly interested in the Grand Duchess Olga and her friends.

He stepped from behind his desk, bland, smiling and unctuous. After bowing low he offered Roche a fat, moist hand.

"Perhaps," he said, "I may be allowed to assist you."

"It's extremely kind of you to offer," said Roche. "But I don't really want any help except a note of introduction to one of the librarians. All I have to do is to look out a word in a dictionary, and I'm quite well able to do that for myself."

"But," said Otto Kuhn, "do you know Hungarian?"

"Not a syllable," said Roche, "and I don't mean to learn."

At least a dozen people had offered to teach him Hungarian since he came to Budapest. It seemed the one hope many men had of earning a little money.

"Or German?" said Otto Kuhn.

"German," said Roche, "is not exactly my strong suit."

"In that case," said Otto Kuhn, "the dictionaries you find here won't be much use to you."

Roche thought this over and saw at once that Otto Kuhn was right. Even in the splen-

did library of Trinity College, Dublin, there is not a single Latin-Hungarian dictionary. It was most unlikely that in Budapest there would be one which gave the English of the Latin words. The best he could hope for would be to find the Hungarian for *Saligia*, and that would be very little use to him.

"If you will allow me," said Otto Kuhn, "I will go with you. I know many languages, and I can translate the Magyar or German word for you."

"Perhaps," said Roche, "you can tell me the meaning of the word I want without bothering with a dictionary at all. What's the English of *Saligia*?"

Otto Kuhn shook his head.

"Alas," he said, "I do not know Latin."

He appealed to the professor, talking to him rapidly in Hungarian. The professor, who was really hungry, looked bewildered. Roche wrote down his word in capital letters, very plainly. The professor stared at it but failed to recognize it. Paula Marcovici left her typewriter and took a good look at *Saligia*. She could make nothing of it, though she was a pious girl and heard a good deal of Latin every Sunday when she went to Mass.

"It appears," said Otto Kuhn, "that we must seek the aid of a dictionary."

He put on an immense fur coat, buckled a pair of snow boots over the shoes he wore, lit a fresh cigar and went out with Roche.

"This is really very good of you," said Roche, "and I'm ashamed to give you all this trouble."

"It is nothing," said Otto Kuhn. "I am very fond of the English, of all the English, and I would willingly do anything for one of them."

Roche meant to explain that he was Irish, not English; but just then they had to cross a broad street along which motors, trams and horse-drawn vehicles were rushing with a total disregard for human life. In Hungary the contest between the horse and the motor is not yet decided. There are still coachmen, sitting behind pairs of fiery steeds who believe that they can win races against motor-propelled taxi-cabs. Very often they do win, being men of reckless courage. But the chauffeurs do their best, and the hospitals are kept well supplied with the people who have been run over in the streets. To explain to a foreigner that an Irishman is not an Englishman is difficult at any time. Not even Roche could attempt it while crossing a street in Budapest.

They reached the Academy of Science and Otto Kuhn made a voluble explanation of

Roche's business to the door-keeper. They were shown into a handsome room hung round with portraits of deceased Hungarian magnates. Here the Librarian came to them and said in very bad French, with much bowing, that Monsieur Roche might consult any book that he liked. Roche demanded a Latin dictionary, and was led into the library. He was given one which would have been a credit to any learned body in Europe. There were five large volumes, and the librarian said that every word ever used by any Latin author might be found there. He himself, while a young man, had helped to compile the dictionary, so he knew what he was talking about. He was bitterly disappointed when it turned out that *Saligia* was not there. Roche, though he would have liked to know the meaning of the word, was rather pleased when the dictionary failed him. It restored his self-respect to know that a whole band of Hungarian scholars, the compilers of the dictionary, knew no more about *Saligia* than he did.

Otto Kuhn wanted to go on to the University to try the library there. Roche protested. He said that the matter was of no real importance. It would not matter much if he never found *Saligia*.

"The fact is," he said, "that I don't care

a pin what it means. I'm only trying to find out in order to oblige a lady."

"Ah," said Otto Kuhn, "the ladies! What they cost us in time and money."

The lady he favoured the night before had certainly been expensive. He told Roche a few interesting things about her.

"But my lady," said Roche, "isn't that sort at all."

"All ladies are that sort," said Otto Kuhn.

All the ladies he knew intimately were that sort. But the Grand Duchess Olga was not. Roche explained this to him.

"The Grand Duchess——" he said. "Did I mention that it was a Grand Duchess who asked me to find out the meaning of Saligia?"

"The Grand Duchess Olga?"

"Exactly," said Roche, "and if you know her you must realize that she's not in the least like the lady you've just been talking about. In fact, she's the exact opposite in every respect."

"In appearance certainly," said Otto Kuhn. "I have seen her."

"And in character," said Roche.

Otto Kuhn shook his head knowingly. He knew all about a romance—that is the word used in polite society—which had coloured the Grand Duchess's early life. Indeed, he knew

of several such romances. Roche hedged a little.

"Her language is rather startling," he said.

"In fact she swears freely."

"They all do at times," said Otto Kuhn.

"But all the same," said Roche, "she's a most religious woman. She wears a cross round her neck under her clothes."

"They often do," said Otto Kuhn, "especially the worst ones."

"But hers is an enormous cross," said Roche, "that size."

He indicated the length and breadth of the Archimandrite's pectoral cross.

"And on the back of it there's an inscription which she asked me to translate for her. That's why I want to find out the meaning of Saligia. The word's in the inscription and the Grand Duchess has an idea that she won't get to heaven unless she knows what it means. 'You must first find Saligia,' that's what the inscription says, 'if you want a crown.'"

"A crown?" said Otto Kuhn.

"Yes. A crown. A gold crown. The thing saints wear in heaven. Harps and crowns you know and all that sort of thing."

"If the lady wants a crown," said Otto Kuhn, "you must certainly try and find out for her what Saligia means."

But this they were not able to do. They consulted eighteen Latin dictionaries in the university library, some large and some small. But not a single one of them contained the word Saligia.

"Well," said Roche, "the Grand Duchess must just be content with practising some ordinary virtue. If she stops swearing and gives up beating and kicking her maid I expect she'll be all right in the end. Saligia can't be a very important virtue. If it was it would be given in some dictionary."

They reached the *Mittel Europäische Bank* again. Roche, remembering the temperature there, refused a pressing invitation to go in and smoke a cigar. He thanked Otto Kuhn effusively for all the help he had given him.

Otto Kuhn wanted to give more help still.

"Perhaps," he said, "I may be able to find out what the word means for you. Will you write it down for me?"

Roche had no objection to doing this. To make things as easy as possible for Otto Kuhn he wrote down the whole of the Archimandrite's hexameter on the back of an envelope. The only thing he forgot was the circumflex accent on the last a. Even if he had remembered that he would not have written it down. It seemed to him of no importance.

"But don't worry over it," he said to Otto Kuhn. "The whole thing isn't worth bothering about. It's just a silly whim of a pious old woman."

Otto Kuhn, however, thought it was worth bothering about. As soon as he got back to his office he copied the hexameter carefully. Then he pushed aside his business papers and wrote a letter.

CHAPTER IV

OTTO KUHN seldom wrote letters with his own hand. He disliked doing work himself which he paid some one else to do for him. Therefore he dictated his letters to Paula Marcovici, the General's daughter, who took them down in shorthand.

When he entered the office she got ready her notebook and pencil. She had finished all the work she had in hand, and fully expected to be given some more. She was very much surprised when Otto Kuhn began to write without speaking to her; even more surprised at being left with nothing to do. That had never happened to her before in Otto Kuhn's office.

A young woman of active and curious mind might have wondered what the letter was about. Paula Marcovici had other things to occupy her thoughts. Would the soles of her shoes cling to the upper leathers for another month? That was one problem which she had to face. There was another. She had purloined and tucked into the front of her blouse two sheets of brown paper in which some new account-books had been wrapped. She intended to put the paper, folded and re-folded, inside her shoes, in the hope that it would keep out some of the water which chilled her feet every morning on the way to the office. Would the thickness of the paper increase the drag on the stitches which still held the soles in place? If so, was it wise to take the risk? That required thought. And there was still something more. Otto Kuhn might miss the brown paper and ask what had become of it. If it were discovered that she had taken it would she be sent to prison for theft? Paula Marcovici was the daughter of a General with many decorations. For his sake as well as her own she did not want to go to prison.

Otto Kuhn wrote on. Paula Marcovici would not have taken the trouble to look over his shoulder if she could.

The Professor finished his work—the adding up of a long column of figures and the summarizing

of the result. He took the slip of paper which held the result of his labours and laid it on the desk at his employer's elbow. Otto Kuhn did not so much as look up from his writing, though the figures were interesting and very important. The Professor shambled back to his chair and sat down with his hands folded on the table in front of him. No more than Paula Marcovici did he speculate on his employer's letter. He was too nearly faint with hunger to speculate about anything, even the condition of his boots. He was conscious of nothing except a sensation of dim misery.

Otto Kuhn finished his letter, folded it, slipped it into an envelope, sealed it, and went out.

Paula Marcovici consulted the Professor about the brown paper and the shoes. He was too hungry to be sympathetic, and had no advice to give. She made up her mind to risk the experiment, took off her shoes, and tucked in the brown paper. It felt comfortable. Whether it would keep out the water she would find out later on. For the moment she felt satisfied that her theft would not be discovered. Even if the paper were missed her shoes were not likely to be searched for it.

Otto Kuhn went to a large coffee-house, one of the most popular in Budapest. There he secured

a table in a quiet corner, by bribing the principal waiter. Though he loved money, Otto Kuhn knew when to part with it, and always secured something in exchange. An Englishman is either ashamed to bribe, or, if driven to it, bribes too lavishly, thereby earning the reputation of being a fool who can easily be cheated afterwards. Otto Kuhn, like most of his race, was far cleverer than an Englishman is in the meaner ways of using money. He bribed just when bribing was advisable, and never overdid it. Therefore he was always sure of a good table in a restaurant, a quiet corner in a coffee-house, and even a bedroom in the Ritz Hotel, until a diplomat, a Grand Duke, or some one like Roche, turned him out.

In a country like Hungary, where the value of money changes from hour to hour, where the price of stocks and shares soars and tumbles with a rapidity unknown even in New York, the time of a financier is precious. A fortune may be lost by indulgence in a cup of coffee, and the successful man, if he eats at all during business hours, must do so in his office, and use only one hand. The other is occupied in holding the telephone receiver to his ear. Yet Otto Kuhn ordered a cup of coffee and sipped it in the most leisurely way. Indeed, he sat for a whole hour at his table in the corner and did not show the

smallest sign of impatience. He knew how to wait, and seemed in no doubt that the man he waited for would sooner or later arrive. From time to time he glanced at the revolving door through which the patrons of the coffee-house came in and went out. Whenever he heard the squeak and growl which the door made when pushed, he looked up. When the door was at rest he sat patiently and sipped his coffee.

It was an important letter which he had in his pocket, and to some people—the Grand Duchess Olga and even to Roche—it would have been interesting. He began it by saying that he had kept a watch on the Grand Duchess. This watch, though fruitless for a time, had led to something important in the end. Otto Kuhn gave an account of the summons which the Grand Duchess had sent to Roche. He described Roche and his business in Budapest.

“The man is a fool, even a greater fool than other Englishmen are. And as you know, all of them are so simply idiotic that it is very difficult to do business with them. With a man of any cleverness and finesse—a man who understands how to conceal his purposes—it is possible to do business. But these English are fools. They say that it is so, or that it is not so, and that we must take it or leave it. An impossible people.”

Roche's singular foolishness was demonstrated

by the nature of his business in Budapest. Was it possible to imagine anything more insane than spending money in helping other people, especially such people as university professors?

Otto Kuhn did not know what passed between "the fool Roche" and the old lady upstairs. But he was able to guess, and felt certain that his guess was correct.

The letter went on to describe Roche's visit to the office. To explain that it was necessary to say something about Dr. Weisz, the Professor of comparative ethnology. Otto Kuhn said a good deal, dwelling with pleasure on the rate of wages which he paid. A condition of society which made it possible to obtain a clerk for less than a quarter of the wages of a housemaid seemed to Otto Kuhn very satisfactory. He sincerely hoped that it might prove permanent, and that no meddling idiot, like Roche, would succeed in altering it.

Next came the story of the hunt for the word "Saligia" through all the Latin dictionaries in Budapest.

Here Otto Kuhn took credit for his own astuteness. He had found out, simply by talking civilly to the English fool, where the word Saligia came from, and who wanted the translation. It formed part of the inscription on the back of a cross in the possession of the Grand

Duchess. She was most anxious to know what the inscription meant, for it concerned the hiding-place of a crown. The Englishman, being a fool, did not know that. He thought that he was dealing with a pious motto of no value to anyone. He had, of his own accord, supplied a copy of the inscription. Here followed the Archimandrite's hexameter, written out very clearly in large letters.

"It is clear," the letter went on, "that the priest had this cross conveyed to her. He must have thought that she would understand it. She does not. Nor does the Englishman. But the meaning is there. The secret lies in the word Saligia. Find out what that means, and you will be able to lay your hands on the crown of Dravidia. I have completed the arrangement for the sale of the emeralds in Amsterdam, and have secured the promise of a reasonable price for them. I also have ready some excellent paste imitations which you will be able to substitute for the real stones. You will then be able to produce the crown to the imbecile people who clamour for it."

It was a long letter, but Otto Kuhn did not see how it could have been made any shorter. He was very pleased with it, still more pleased with himself, and most pleased of all at the thought of his share of the price of the emeralds.

A young man, the young man Otto Kuhn had been waiting for, came into the coffee-house. He was very shabbily dressed, wearing cracked boots, and an overcoat which, now threadbare, had never been good. He had a sallow face, and a nose so obtrusive that it would have been remarkable anywhere, even in the Opera house in Budapest, where noses of the kind are very common. Otto Kuhn rose from his seat and beckoned. The sallow young man crossed the room and sat down at the little table in the quiet corner.

The business between the two did not take long, and was conducted in such a way that the waiter who hovered near would not have understood anything about it even if he had been given to eavesdropping.

Otto Kuhn handed the sealed envelope to the young man. There was no address on it, simply a man's name without the mention of the house, street, town, or even the country in which he was to be found. But the name was enough for the sallow young man. He nodded. Indeed, the name on the envelope was sufficiently well known in Eastern Europe and among people interested in politics everywhere. Karl Gyorgy was the President of the Committee of Public Safety of Dravidia, and was generally understood to be the ablest and most important member of the

Government of that communistic republic. But though a great many people knew the name and the man's reputation, very few of them could have delivered the letter. No post office in Europe would have undertaken the task. The young man with the sallow face saw no particular difficulty. He asked no questions, and raised no objections when Otto Kuhn handed him the envelope. He nodded and slipped it into his pocket. If he had been asked to leave a note at the Ritz Hotel as he passed the door he could not have accepted the task more easily.

Otto Kuhn next handed the young man a packet of notes—English treasury notes and American dollar bills mixed up together. The total value was £150, which seems a large sum for the expenses of a journey of some six or seven hundred miles. But travelling in countries which have accepted the doctrines of the Communists is a very expensive business. In England, a capitalistic country with a bourgeois civilization, a traveller buys a railway ticket at a moderate price, and tips a porter occasionally. In Dravida, where the railways belong to the people, a good citizen need not pay for his ticket, but it is necessary to bribe every one, from the Minister of Transport down to the man who greases the wheels of the carriages, and no one cares for a bribe in Dravidian money. Indeed, it is only

possible to bribe sufficiently in English or American money. No one, unless he took a small cart with him, could carry enough Austrian, German, Hungarian or Dravidian notes to pay his way.

The young man counted the notes, pocketed them and nodded again.

That was all that happened. Otto Kuhn rose, shook hands with the young man, and went back to his office. There, for the hour that remained before luncheon time, Professor Weisz and Paula Marcovici worked at very high pressure. So did Otto Kuhn. There was a great deal of lost time to be made up for.

Just before he left the office Otto Kuhn spoke to the Professor.

"You remember the word that young Englishman asked about this morning?" he said.

"Saligia?" said the Professor.

"Yes. Do you know anything about it?"

The Professor turned over the papers on his desk helplessly.

"I have never seen it quoted on Stock Exchange lists," he said.

"You idiot," said Otto Kuhn. "It's not the name of a company. It's a—it's a—I don't know what the devil it is. But you ought to know. What's the good of being a professor if you don't know. Hunt round and find out."

Ask all the other professors. Some of you must know."

Dr. Weisz asked every professor he met for the next three days. Only one of them, a man whose subject was chemistry, had any suggestion to offer. He said that he thought—but could not feel certain—that it was a name given to a new preparation of the essence of the Thyroid gland, advertised in American papers. He admitted that he had only seen the advertisement once, and had paid no particular attention to it. He was not therefore really certain that Saligia was the name. It might have been—he rather thought it was—thyrigia.

Dr. Weisz brought this information to Otto Kuhn, and received curses for his reward.

CHAPTER V

THE Grand Duchess did not appear in the dining-room of the Ritz Hotel that night. Roche watched her table till it became hopeless to expect her. Then he sent a message up to her room asking her to receive him. His work in Budapest was done. He meant to start for home next day. He thought it courteous to

report his want of success with Saligia. He also wanted to see the old lady again. She interested him because she was quite unlike anyone he had ever met before.

In a few minutes he received his reply. The Grand Duchess would be glad to see him. He went upstairs and was shown by the splendid footman, not into the sitting-room where he had been the night before, but into a bedroom, apparently the Grand Duchess's bedroom. She was there, dressed in a faded blue dressing-gown, with a pair of moth-eaten fur slippers on her feet. Her hair hung down over her neck in a thin plait. She was standing beside the bed, stirring a mess which steamed in an electrically heated pot.

She looked round as Roche entered.

"Are you afraid of flu?" she asked.

"No," said Roche. "I'm not. Though I don't particularly want to catch it just now. I'm going home to-morrow."

"Or typhus?" said the Grand Duchess.

"I shouldn't like to catch it," said Roche. "Have you got either?"

"I haven't," said the Grand Duchess. "But she has."

She picked the spoon, with which she was stirring, out of the pot and pointed with it to the bed. Roche noticed for the first time that there

was some one in it, some one who lay huddled up with the bedclothes pulled over her head.

"These damned fools," said the Grand Duchess, "are always catching something. The doctor says it's flu. I think it's typhus. Just take a look at her and tell me what you think."

She pulled the bedclothes back and displayed a tangled mass of dark hair and a very flushed face. Roche recognized the maid who had darned stockings the night before.

"She looks feverish," he said.

"She is," said the Grand Duchess.

Then she spoke to the maid in the bed in a language which Roche did not know. The girl, though she was in a high fever, understood the order given to her. She opened her mouth wide and lay gaping. The Grand Duchess picked a large white tabloid out of an untidy parcel and dropped it into the girl's mouth.

"Aspirin," she said. "That's the eighth she's had since the doctor left."

"If you give her any more you'll probably kill her," said Roche.

"You couldn't kill one of these peasant girls," said the Grand Duchess. "They're as tough as ostriches. And it won't matter in the least if this one does happen to die. There are plenty more."

The Grand Duchess detached the pot from the

wire which led the electric current to it. She lifted the girl up in the bed and propped her with pillows. Then she sat down and began to feed her.

"Barley gruel," she said, spooning the mess rapidly into the girl's mouth.

The stuff looked extremely hot. Roche fully expected to hear the girl cry out with the pain of a scalded mouth. Perhaps she was too well trained to protest against anything the Grand Duchess did. Perhaps Dravidian peasant girls have leather instead of mucous membrane in their mouths. She swallowed the gruel in silence.

Roche looked round him. The girl was in the Grand Duchess's own bed. It was a fine bed, covered with good blankets, clean sheets, and a thick pink eiderdown. The pillows were large and soft. A shaded electric lamp stood beside it. A bell-push hung ready to hand. It was a handsome, even a luxurious, bed, plainly meant for the Grand Duchess. In a corner of the room was a narrow couch with a couple of rugs thrown over it—the sleeping place meant for the maid. Yet the girl had been put into the good bed. The Grand Duchess would have to sleep in the other, if she slept at all.

The night before the Grand Duchess had kicked the girl and spoken of whipping her.

This night, though she said it did not matter whether the girl died or not, the Grand Duchess was feeding her with scalding gruel, and dropping tabloids of aspirin into her mouth. The ways of members of Eastern European aristocracies seem odd to us, because it is only in Eastern Europe that the real spirit of aristocracies survive. Roche did not in the least understand the Grand Duchess.

"Well," she said, when the gruel was finished, "what about Saligia?"

"I'm sorry to say," said Roche, "that I couldn't find out the meaning of the word. It wasn't in any dictionary that I consulted, and I think I saw all the best in Budapest."

"Hell!" said the Grand Duchess.

She took the pillows from behind the girl's back and laid her down again. Then she dropped another tabloid of aspirin into her mouth. Roche still thought that she would poison the girl, but he was touched by the care which the old lady took of her maid. It seemed to him wonderful that a Grand Duchess, a lady belonging to a royal family, should give up her own dinner and her own bed, should concoct messes in a pot, and devote herself to the service of her servant. He had known many ladies who never said "damn" or mentioned the word bug, who spoke of the lower orders with kindness and

even with respect, but who sent their maids to hospital the moment they got ill—a much pleasanter thing for the maid than the home nursing of the Grand Duchess—and never put themselves to the smallest inconvenience for anyone.

“It doesn’t matter what Saligia means,” said Roche.

“It does,” said the Grand Duchess.

“Not to you,” said Roche. “You are practising Christian charity, which is the greatest of all virtues, and, even if you never find out what Saligia means, you’ll get your crown all right.”

That was not the sort of speech Roche often made. Indeed, he had never said anything of the sort before ; but he was filled with admiration of the Grand Duchess’s conduct, and still believed her, in spite of the things she said, to be a very religious woman, with her heart set on getting to Heaven.

The Grand Duchess pulled the bedclothes over the maid’s head again and tucked them in fiercely. It seemed to Roche that if the girl did not die of aspirin poisoning she certainly would of asphyxiation. The Grand Duchess was of a different opinion.

“She’ll sweat it out of her before morning,” she said, “if it’s anything short of typhus.”

Then she invited Roche to sit down, and settled herself in a chair opposite to him.

"What's that you've just said?" she asked.
"Say it again, will you?"

Roche was still pleased with his little speech, a delicately phrased compliment, suited to a lady of strong religious feeling. He repeated in even nicer words what he had said about the Grand Duchess and the heavenly crown.

"Well," said the Grand Duchess, "of all the idiots I ever met, you're the worst. Do you imagine that I'm one of those whining, puling nuns of women who go about the world doing silly things in order to qualify for a seat in Heaven?"

The maid, struggling feebly for air, succeeded in pushing her nose out from the blankets which enveloped her head. The Grand Duchess saw what she had done, and dealt with her firmly. As she tucked in the blankets again and replaced the eiderdown over the girl's head, she continued to speak to Roche.

"When I want to go to Heaven," she said—"and let me tell you young man that won't be for some time yet—but when I do want to go I shall have myself properly announced at the door and then walk in."

"I'm extremely sorry if I've annoyed you," said Roche mildly.

"You've annoyed me," said the Grand Duchess, "by being a fool. I hate fools, and the world is crammed with them."

Roche was roused to an effort of self-defence.

"You must admit," he said, "that my mistake was natural. You showed me a very large cross which you wear round your neck——"

"My good man," said the Grand Duchess, "you didn't surely mistake it for gold?"

"I never thought about what it's made of," said Roche.

The Grand Duchess's remark confused him. He did not see that the material of which the cross was made mattered one way or another. It would have been a religious emblem even if it had been made of clay.

"I regarded it," he said, "simply as a sacred symbol."

"It's nothing of the sort."

"But I naturally thought it was," said Roche, "especially when you showed me that inscription about the way to seek for a heavenly crown."

"The inscription has nothing whatever to do with a heavenly crown," said the Grand Duchess, "or a harp, or a palm, or a white stone, or a new name, or a linen robe. It's simply a message from the Archimandrite, telling me

where to find the crown of Dravidia which he and my nephew succeeded in hiding just before the revolution broke out."

"Oh," said Roche feebly.

"Yes, 'oh,'" said the Grand Duchess. "Now you see what a fool you have been making of yourself."

"Of course," said Roche, "if I had known that was what the inscription was about I should have searched for the meaning of Saligia in a different way."

He did not for the moment see any way of finding the meaning of the word except by looking in dictionaries. But he felt that he had been misled.

"D'you think you can find it now?" said the Grand Duchess.

"I shall certainly try again," said Roche. "But why not ask the man who wrote the inscription, the Archimandrite, or whatever you call him. That seems the simplest thing to do."

"By this time the Archimandrite is probably murdered," said the Grand Duchess. "If he isn't, he is shut up somewhere where I can't possibly get at him. You don't know the swine who are governing Dravidia now, or you wouldn't make that suggestion. Dirty dogs, every one of them."

"Isn't there anyone else who knows?" said Roche.

"Of course my nephew does," said the Grand Duchess. "But he's a fool like most other people, though not quite such a fool as you. He never mistook me for a saint."

That unfortunate mistake of Roche's was still unforgiven. He apologized again. Then he got back to the subject of the lost crown.

"Your nephew?" he said. "Is that the late King?"

"Exactly," said the Grand Duchess. "Michael. The only nephew I have, thank God."

"He's sure to know where the crown is," said Roche, "if he helped to hide it."

"He does," said the Grand Duchess, "but he won't tell. I said he was a fool, didn't I? Well, all he ever says when I write to him about the crown is that he's glad to be rid of it and hopes that it'll never be found again. He always wanted to abdicate, even before the revolution. That's the particular kind of fool he is."

Roche did not know much about Dravidia, but the little he had heard of that country inclined him to think that a man who wanted to escape being king of it might not be altogether a fool.

"Don't you think, perhaps," he said, "that

King Michael is doing the most sensible thing possible? It can't be really pleasant to be a king in a world that's just been made safe for democracy."

The Grand Duchess jumped up from her chair and seized Roche by the shoulders.

"If you dare to talk that Wilsonian-American cant to me," she said fiercely, "I'll shake you till your teeth drop out of your mouth."

By way of showing what she could do when roused, she shook Roche violently.

"I only . . ."—he chattered—"meant that . . ."—she still shook him—"as a kind of joke."

The Grand Duchess accepted the apology and let him go.

"I don't understand English jokes," she said, "and I never did. But if I can find that crown I'll make a joke of my own in Dravidia which those damned Communists won't enjoy. I'll hang them up by their heels in rows, and have them flogged to death. That's the sort of joke I like."

"Isn't it odd," said Roche mildly, "how the sense of humour differs among different peoples? I shouldn't laugh in the least, I shouldn't even smile, if you did that to me."

Then the Grand Duchess did an odd thing, so odd that it surprised Roche, although he thought

he was past being surprised at anything she did or said. She went over to the dressing-table, unlocked a leather case and took out her amber beads. She handed them to Roche.

"Take them in your left hand," she said. "Now give them back to me with your right hand."

Roche obeyed. She received the beads, pressed them to her mouth, and then hung them round Roche's neck.

"Sit still," she whispered, "and don't speak."

She knelt down in front of him and grasped the necklace. She pulled it slowly round his neck until every bead had made the complete circle. As she did so she muttered what sounded like a number of rapidly muttered prayers, handling the necklace very much as a pious nun might handle her rosary. At last she got up, lifted the beads off Roche's neck, and put them back in their case.

"You are to be trusted," she said, "utterly. The amber never deceived me."

"Of course I'm to be trusted," said Roche. "You might have guessed that without all those incantations. But I can't promise to find out what Saligia means. I may not be able to. You said I'm a fool, you know."

"If I give you the name of the man who knows will you go and ask him?" she said.

"With pleasure," said Roche, "if he lives in any accessible place. But I can't go wandering off to Tibet in search of a Mahatma. I haven't either time or money for that kind of world travel."

"Is Ireland too far for you to go?" said the Grand Duchess. "Ballysax, Co. Kildare?"

"Certainly not," said Roche. "That's not thirty miles from Dublin. If your—your—" There could not possibly be a Mahatma in Co. Kildare. It was an unlikely habitat for any devotee of the ancient wisdom of the east. Roche felt a little puzzled. "If your spiritual adviser—" That seemed a good phrase. "If your spiritual adviser," he repeated, "lives there, I'll go and see him with pleasure."

"You must say nothing about me," said the Grand Duchess. "Do not mention my name, but find out from him if possible what Saligia means. I think he knows. Yes. He must know. But first try every other way of finding out."

She scribbled a name and address on a card which she handed to Roche.

"Mr. Michael Donovan, Ballysax House, Co. Kildare, Ireland."

"A good Irish name," said Roche. "One

never knows, of course, but I should be surprised if a man with that name and that address dabbles much in the occult. He sounds to me more like a horse trainer."

"You promise," said the Grand Duchess.

"Certainly," said Roche.

"First try every way to find out what Saligia means, and only as the last resort go to that man."

"I understand."

"And you are not to tell him that you come from me or that you are searching for the crown."

"I'll simply ask him the Saligia riddle," said Roche.

"If he knows that you are seeking the crown or that I sent you," said the Grand Duchess, "he will not tell you anything."

"It won't be easy," said Roche, "to ask a man I don't know a conundrum of that sort without a word of explanation or excuse. I mean to say, it will look odd if I simply walk up to him and say 'What's Saligia?' However, I'll try."

The Grand Duchess seemed satisfied with the promise. She went over to the patient in the bed, uncovered the girl's head, and administered another tabloid of aspirin. Roche bade her a rather hurried good night and went away. He

had the greatest dislike of death-bed scenes, and felt sure that no girl—not even if she was “as tough as an ostrich”—could long survive the Grand Duchess’s nursing.

CHAPTER I

AS soon as Roche reached Dublin he began his search for the meaning of Saligia. It worried him to feel that he could not understand the word ; and what the Grand Duchess told him about it had excited him.

Dictionaries were of no more use in Dublin than they were in Budapest. Even Ducange's *Glossarium*, that treasury of low Latin words, had no mention of Saligia. Roche took to asking all sorts of people whether they had ever heard the word. No true citizen of Dublin, born and bred in that amazing city, ever admits that there is anything in the world that he does not know all about. Roche got a large number of solutions of the puzzle, all presented to him with equal confidence.

A judge, whom Roche met in the smoking-room of the University Club, said that Saligia was the name of a new disease. This seemed

unlikely. You cannot very well hide a crown in a disease. And the crown of Dravidia was apparently concealed in Saligia. But the judge was sure of himself.

"You know the way doctors go on," he said. "They swagger a lot about having discovered a preventative serum which they say will stamp out some disease or other. When everybody has been inoculated, the disease turns up again just as usual, an epidemic of it. The doctors have to save their faces, so they say that what people are dying of isn't the original disease at all, but something quite different, although it seems to be the same. They give it a new name, and are thoroughly pleased with themselves. You will find if you look into it that Saligia is simply a new name for flu or rheumatism, or something else that we have been hearing about all our lives."

Roche was not very hopeful, but he was determined not to neglect any possible clue. He called on a well-known doctor who happened to be a friend of his, and asked him if Saligia was a disease. The doctor scoffed at the idea.

"You may take it from me," he said, "that all new medical words are derived from the Greek, and end either in itis or oid. Saligia is obviously Latin. Besides, it's rather a pretty

word, and when we invent names for new diseases we make them as ugly as possible."

"I suppose," said Roche, "that you don't by any chance know what Saligia is."

"Well," said the doctor, "as it happens I do. Saligia is the name of a mare which was entered for the Grand National last year. She was scratched and was never mentioned in the betting; but if you wait a minute, I'll tell you all about her."

He crossed the room to his bookshelf, moved a few large standard works on surgery, and then drew out from behind them a copy of one of those excellent publications which are to horses what Burke, De Brett, and the *Almanach de Gotha* are to men.

"Here you are," he said. "Sybillia—sire, King Billy—dam, Sybil."

"But I want Saligia," said Roche, "not Sybillia."

"You must have picked up the name wrong," said the doctor; "there's no horse called Saligia. Don't you see that it's bound to be Sybillia when it's by King Billy, out of Sybil?"

One of the assistant librarians in the university told Roche that Saligia was the name of a hairwash which his wife used.

"There's always a bottle," he said, "stand-

ing on the shelf in our bathroom, and I see it every day of my life."

This was not much help to Roche. A crown is only connected with a hairwash by the fact that both are used for adorning the human head. Next day the assistant librarian hurried after Roche in the quadrangle.

"By the way," he said, "the name of that stuff you want, the hairwash you mentioned to me yesterday, isn't Saligia. It's Capillia. It costs seven-and-six a large bottle, and my wife recommends it strongly. When I told her you were looking for something of the sort she said you ought to try that."

There was an elderly professor, a wizened, crusted old man, of colossal learning and even more colossal prejudices, who gave Roche his first glimmer of hope.

"Saligia," he said, "is one of the new Gaelic names which the lunatics who are running this country now are giving to places so that people like me don't recognize them. Kingstown, for instance, is Dun Laoghaire. Did you ever hear anything more absurd? Saligia is either Black-rock or Greystones, I forget which."

It seemed extremely unlikely that the Archimandrite of Dravidia, hotly pursued by murderous revolutionaries, could have escaped to Ireland and hidden the crown at Greystones or

Blackrock. It was still more unlikely that he would have gone back to Dravidia afterwards. But the professor's idea seemed more hopeful than any of the others. A crown, a sceptre, an orb, or even a throne might certainly be hidden in Blackrock or Greystones. No such things could be concealed in a disease, a race-horse, or a bottle of hairwash.

Roche invited a very eminent Gaelic scholar to lunch with him, and asked him where Saligia was. The scholar denied indignantly that the place was in Ireland at all.

"Saligia," he said, "isn't a Gaelic word. You ought to be able to see that by merely glancing at it. The Irish language is the purest in Europe. It doesn't borrow words, particularly place-names from other languages, as the miserable English do. It is rich enough to get on without help from foreign sources. That is why it has such a high educational value and why——"

He drifted into an interminable defence of the Free State's policy of making Irish compulsory in schools, and Roche became extremely sorry that he had asked him to lunch. He was no nearer finding out what Saligia meant, and he was very badly bored.

A very clever lady, one of the teachers in a great girls' college, made what seemed to Roche

a hopeful suggestion at an afternoon tea-party. She was in the habit of spending her spare time in solving the puzzles devised by *The Queen* and other papers, for sharpening the wits of their readers. She said that Saligia was obviously part of an acrostic, and explained her meaning, without making it any clearer to Roche, by saying that it was one of the two pillars. The other pillar, if it could be arrived at, would probably give the clue to the meaning of Saligia. Roche asked her to try her hand at reconstructing the acrostic, and a few days later the lady handed him her solution. Saligia was one pillar. Emerald was the other. The line of reasoning which led to emerald ran along the words—scene—atom—lane—inner—gala—ill—and add, which she called lights. Roche failed altogether to understand how these words, even when arranged in a neat square, proved that Saligia meant emerald. But it seemed possible that there might be emeralds set in the Dravidian crown. He wrote a letter to the Grand Duchess saying that, after immense toil, he had reached the word emerald, and asking whether jewels of that kind appeared in the crown.

After he had sent off the letter it occurred to him that the Archimandrite, if he made up acrostics at all, was most unlikely to use English

words in their composition. His "lights" and the remaining pillar would probably be in Dravidian, possibly Latin, certainly not English. He was scarcely surprised when he received a disgusted telegram from the Grand Duchess.

"Of course. Everybody knows that."

After that failure there seemed nothing for it but to seek out Mr. Michael Donovan, of Ballysax House, Co. Kildare. It was a fair inference from the address that the man had something to do with horses. No one lives in Co. Kildare unless he trains horses, breeds horses, rides horses in hunts and steeplechases, or wishes and hopes to do these things. Roche went to the sporting doctor who had told him about the Sybillia of the Grand National and asked him if he knew Mr. Michael Donovan. The doctor did.

"A thundering good chap," he said. "I wish there were more like him. An out-and-out sportsman, gives a big subscription to the Kildare hunt, practically keeps open house. I've dined with him lots of times when I've been down there. He rode one of his own horses in the Naas Point-to-Point and won."

"Can you give me a letter of introduction to him?" said Roche.

"Of course I can, if you like. But there's not the least necessity for that. All you have

to do is to drop into his house on a hunting day. If you're on a horse of any kind he'll ask you to dinner. Even if you're not riding he's sure to give you a drink."

"A regular old-fashioned Irish gentleman apparently," said Roche. "I thought that type had been wiped out."

"The funny thing about him," said the doctor, "is that you wouldn't think to talk to him that he's Irish at all, and nobody knows exactly who he is."

"Donovan is an Irish enough name."

"So is Michael. But this man isn't related to any Donovan anyone ever heard of."

In Ireland, which is a small country, everybody is more or less related to everybody else, and a man's family history is as well known as his reputation for paying—or not paying—his debts.

"Probably a returned American," said Roche. "Some fellow who went out there, made a pile, and has come back to spend it."

"You might think that," said the doctor, "if he talked like a Yank. But he doesn't. I don't know exactly what he does talk like—not an Englishman, or a Scot, or any kind of colonial that I've ever come across. Anyhow, whatever he is, if you want to know him, there's nothing in the world easier. Just run down

next Thursday. As it happens the meet is near his place that day, and he's sure to be out. I can't go myself. Booked up for a consultation over an old chap who thinks he ought to have his appendix out. He's a silly ass if he does, but I shan't try and stop him. So I can mount you if you care to go. I've a couple of horses which I keep in Naas so as to be able to run down for a day whenever I can get off. You can hack over from there. The hotel is vile ; but if you turn up at Ballysax and look like a forlorn stranger, Donovan will put you up for the night."

Roche, like most Irishmen, could ride. He could not afford to keep hunters, but no one enjoyed a day with the hounds more than he did when a friend mounted him. He would have accepted the doctor's offer even if there had been no question of meeting Mr. Michael Donovan.

CHAPTER II

THE Irish Revolution, though a half-hearted affair compared to the revolution in Dravidia, has shorn the Kildare hunt of some of its ancient glory. There are fewer red coats

to be seen at the meets now. Fewer shiny silk hats, fewer really well-cut habits. There are far fewer of the people whose photographs delight the readers of illustrated weekly papers. But the sporting spirit survives unimpaired. And the horses—it is doubtful whether even the rule of the Dravidian Communists would cure Irishmen of breeding good horses and riding them across country. Politics, the making of constitutions, the upholding of causes, even the securing of fairly well-paid posts in the civil service, are important things, no doubt. But the horse is greater than all these. Therefore, in Ireland, though great houses and splendid public buildings are laid in ashes, though trade languishes, though life becomes an uncertain thing, owing to the enthusiasm of patriots, hunting survives and race meetings flourish.

Roche, on his friend's horse, was one of a considerable company when he rode up to the meet. He had no difficulty in making the acquaintance of Mr. Michael Donovan. A very few minutes after he arrived on the lawn of Ballysax House he was drinking a glass of port and eating a sandwich in the fine old dining-room.

In the course of the day he was often in the company of Mr. Donovan. They shivered

together during the long wait while the hounds sought in vain for a fox in the neighbouring covert. Having trotted on to a wood where a fox was found they galloped side by side during the first part of the run. Roche had a chance of admiring the way in which Mr. Donovan took a nasty fence. His own mount refused and he was left behind ; but he came on Mr. Donovan again while the fox was being dug out of an unstopped earth in which he had taken refuge.

The day ended, just as the doctor had prophesied, in an invitation for Roche to dine and sleep at Ballysax House.

Roche was impressed with the fact that Mr. Michael Donovan, whoever he was, had money enough to be comfortable and knew how to spend it. That is to say, he spent it exactly as Mr. Roche would have spent money if he happened to possess it. The house was old and handsome, and though such houses may be bought for very little in Ireland now it still takes a good deal of money to live in them. Mr. Donovan knew what was due to that kind of house. There were two well-trained men-servants and several trim maids in caps and aprons. There were large open fires blazing cheerfully in all the rooms. There were thick carpets, and deep soft sofas. There was shining

silver—old silver beautiful to look at—on the tea table. There was abundance of food. There were other drinks besides tea, and such cigars as satisfy a man after a day on horse-back, when, having eaten and drunk, he lies back and stretches his legs.

Later on there was a great steaming bath and the ministrations of a servant who produced clothes and linen which fitted well enough to be comfortable. There was dinner, and it was plain with the first mouthful of soup that Mr. Donovan kept a good cook. Moreover, he understood wine. The sherry with the soup was dry, the claret, just warmed, had the delicate flavour of a good vintage. They have some excellent port in Trinity College, and Roche knew enough about the wine to appreciate what Mr. Donovan gave him at dessert.

He reflected, as he sipped the port, on the wisdom of his host. How few of those who possess money know how to get the best that their money will buy. The wealthy American, wandering like a lost soul among the hotels of Europe, achieves a suite with a private bathroom and the torment of parasites hovering for tips. The owner of a fortune who seeks social advancement in the whirlpool of a great city wins feverish successes and blighting snubs.

The fool, who, being rich, wants to be richer still, wrecks his nervous system and disintegrates his digestion so that he becomes the prey of eager doctors. Michael Donovan so used his money that he rode home through the damp gloom of winter evenings to warmth and soft lights and beautiful old things and the contented sense of peace which belongs only to him who eats and drinks with appetite won on horseback in the open air.

Michael Donovan talked well, with enthusiasm about horses and hunting, with touches of sly humour about local gossip, with honest laughter at the delightful ways of Irish peasants. Beyond these subjects he did not care to go. Save that he never touched politics, he might have been, what it seemed he ought to be, an Irish country gentleman. Yet the more the man talked the more convinced Roche became that he was not that.

He spoke English with singular correctness and purity of accent. But he did not speak quite as an English gentleman, even less as an Irish gentleman does. He used, with excellent effect and always in the right place, the slang phrases and words current at the time. But it was all the time plain that English was not his mother tongue.

Roche talked too. There were few occasions

on which Roche did not talk, and that evening he was talking with an object. He wanted to guide the conversation in such a direction that it would be possible for him, without startling abruptness, to ask the meaning of Saligia. That was not an easy thing to do. Donovan shied away from any talk of foreign countries, keeping to Ireland, Irish horses and Irish society, as if he were not interested in anything else. He also declined to be drawn into any talk about classical languages, the work of universities, or the education given at schools. Indeed, it would not have been easy to get to Saligia even by way of foreign politics or low Latin, supposing that Roche had forced his way as far as low Latin. It is not easy to introduce Saligia into conversation at all when you have not the slightest idea what the word means. There is no possibility of natural approach by way of familiar things to something which is totally unknown.

At last, while yawning over a final whisky-and-soda, Roche realized that if he was to ask his question at all he must do so without preparing the way for it.

"By the way," he said, "do you know anything about Saligia?"

"Let me see," said Donovan, speaking with the slight hesitation of a man who makes an

effort of memory, "is that the old woman in the lodge at my back gate?"

"It isn't a woman at all," said Roche, "old or young."

"It sounded like a woman," said Donovan. "Sally is always a woman, except a sally-lun, of course."

English might not be his native language, but he knew it well. It is not every one who knows what a sally-lun is, or would think of mentioning it as the only Sally not a woman.

Donovan's remarks about the Sally at the back gate and the sally-lun were made with such good-humoured simplicity and with such complete straightforwardness that Roche was almost sure that the Grand Duchess had been mistaken. Donovan, whoever he was, knew no more about Saligia than anyone else.

"Perhaps," said Roche, "you know nothing about it. If so, forgive me for asking."

"The fact is," said Donovan, "that I don't dabble in stocks and shares at all. I'm the worst man living to give an opinion about things of that kind. I never look at the financial columns of the papers, and, absurd as it may seem to you, I never heard of Saligia in my life. Is it a mine? It sounds rather like a mine."

"No, it's not," said Roche. "It's—it's—"

the fact is, I don't know what it is. That's the reason I asked you."

"It's not a riddle, is it? I'm no good at riddles and never was."

Roche felt nearly certain that Donovan did not recognize the word Saligia. But the Grand Duchess had been quite certain that he knew all about it. Roche felt that he ought to make another effort.

"It's not exactly a riddle," he said. "It's a cryptogram. At least, I fancy so."

"Same thing to me," said Donovan, "or worse. I don't even know what a cryptogram is."

"Or part of an acrostic."

Donovan yawned.

"Not after a day's hunting, my dear fellow," he said. "I simply couldn't face it."

The Grand Duchess had bound Roche over not to mention her name to Donovan. But he was under no promise of secrecy about the story of the crown of Dravidia. He felt entitled to speak about that, though he thought it wise to avoid mentioning names.

"If you'll allow me to tell you a rather queer story," he said, "you'll understand why I've asked you about Saligia."

"Fire away," said Donovan. "I like queer stories, and there are no ladies present."

"This isn't a story of that kind," said Roche.

Donovan seemed a little disappointed, but he lit a fresh cigar and settled down to listen.

"There was a king," said Roche, "a king of quite a small country, in fact, of a paltry little state which hardly anyone has ever heard of. A revolution broke out and the king bolted."

"Sensible man," said Donovan. "The only wonder is he didn't bolt before. It must be a rotten job being a king nowadays."

"He not only bolted," said Roche. "He disappeared."

Donovan appeared to be getting interested in the story.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that he didn't set up somewhere as exiled monarch with a sham court and spend his time in getting up foolish intrigues? That's what most of them do."

"This one didn't," said Roche. "He vanished altogether. Apparently he didn't want to go back."

"I don't wonder," said Donovan. "Those Balkan States must be beastly places to live in, even if you are not a king. If you are, I expect they're simply hell."

Roche had said nothing about the Balkans,

or, so far as he could remember, dropped a hint that the kingdom he was speaking of was in Eastern Europe. It surprised him a little that Donovan should fix the site of the kingdom for himself.

"Before bolting," Roche went on, "he and the archbishop of those parts hid the crown. The king, as I said, disappeared. So the archbishop was the only man left who knew where the crown was. The revolutionaries arrested him, but he managed to get a message out of the country giving the secret of the hiding-place."

"He would," said Donovan. "They're as crafty as foxes, those Archimandrites."

Roche had not used the word Archimandrite, and it is not a title often given to ecclesiastics in Western Europe. Indeed, there are probably very few Irish country gentlemen who know exactly what an Archimandrite is, and not one who would of his own accord use the word in speaking of an archbishop. Roche became suspicious. It seemed to him that he was telling the story of the Dravidian crown to a man who already knew it.

"The message," he went on, "was a Latin hexameter: 'Si vis coronam saligia prima petenda.'"

He looked up sharply as he repeated the

words. But there was no sign in Donovan's face that he understood them.

"Fancy the old fellow knowing that much Latin," he said. "Most surprising."

"I've told you the story," said Roche, "all except the names which I fancy you know as well as I do."

Donovan nodded.

"There's no use pretending I don't," he said.

"Well then," said Roche, "tell me what Saligia means."

"I give you my word of honour," said Donovan, "that I never heard the word in my life till you said it just now."

Roche was puzzled. He had no doubt whatever that Donovan was speaking the truth; that he never had heard the word before. But the Grand Duchess had been perfectly confident that Mr. Michael Donovan, of Ballysax House, Co. Kildare, knew all about the crown, and could give the information she wanted. For awhile the two men sat in silence. It was Donovan who spoke first.

"If you'll take my advice," he said, "you'll keep out of this business of the Dravidian crown. No good ever comes of messing about in Balkan politics. The people there are only to be distinguished from savages by their amaz-

ing capacity for plausible lying, and if anybody meddles in their affairs he's simply asking for trouble of the worst kind."

"I dare say you know more about them than I do," said Roche, "but——"

"I know all there is to know about them."

"All the same," said Roche, "I mean to find out what Saligia means if I can."

Once more there was a long silence. Once more it was Donovan who broke it.

"I suppose," he said, "that it was the Grand Duchess Olga who put you on to me."

Roche, remembering his promise, made no reply.

"You may just as well admit it," said Donovan, "for she's the only person in the world who knows who I am. It must have been she who told you. She's a good-hearted old soul, but she's a fanatic, and filled up to her back teeth with the most absurd superstition. If you're wise you'll simply drop that aunt of mine and her affairs."

"Your aunt! Of course, I might have guessed."

"That I'm, or rather that I was, King Michael of Dravidia."

"Then you know where the crown is?"

"Of course I do," said the King. "I hid it. But I was speaking the truth just now

when I said I couldn't translate that word of the Archimandrite's. I never heard it before in my life."

"But if you know where the crown is," said Roche, "why not tell the Grand Duchess? She's frightfully keen to get it."

"I know she is; but I won't tell her. Don't you see that if she once succeeded in laying her hands on that crown she'd insist on my going back to wear it?"

He stood up as he spoke.

"Just look round you," he said. "This is a comfortable room, isn't it? It's a good house. You've had a good dinner, a very good dinner. I've got excellent servants. I've six horses in the stables, and as good a pack of hounds to ride to as any in Europe. I've got pretty well all there is to get in life, the absolute plum best of what's going, haven't I?"

Roche was very much of opinion that he had. For a sane, wholesome-minded man there is no better life than that of a country gentleman with money enough to escape worry.

"I'd be a fool if I gave it all up to live in a great draughty palace surrounded by dressed-up savages with nasty Communist Jews lurking round every corner to throw bombs at me.

"I see that," said Roche. "But I don't see why you'd be forced to go back. Let the

Grand Duchess have the crown and wear it herself. The job would suit her exactly. I suppose there'd be no objection to her being queen if she had the crown."

"Any man, woman or child," said the King, "would be King or Queen of Dravidia if he produced the crown. That's the absurd thing about the Dravidian people. They'd accept that fellow Karl Gyorgy as King—you know the ruffian I mean, the head of the present Government—if only he had the crown."

"Then why on earth not let the Grand Duchess have it?"

The King sat down again.

"Look here," he said, "I've talked quite frankly to you, and I've told you what nobody else in Ireland knows. If you give me away——"

"I won't," said Roche. "I give you my word that I won't so much as even hint at who you are to anyone."

"Thanks," said the King. "If you do, I shall simply have to bolt again, and I don't see where I can bolt to where I'd be half as comfortable as I am here."

"But I still don't see," said Roche, "why you won't let the Grand Duchess know where the crown is."

"I won't," said the King, "because if I did

there'd be trouble, the very worst imaginable kind of trouble. Trouble for me and for my aunt Olga, and for the Dravidian people, and for those loathly Communist Jews—not that I'd mind about them. By Jove, there might be a European war. That's why I won't tell."

"Well," said Roche, "I mean to find out if I can."

"Thank God," said the King, "the Archimandrite is safely shut up or dead."

"But I have his hexameter," said Roche.

"Well, I can't stop you if you choose to work away at that."

"If Saligia has any meaning at all, I'll get at it," said Roche.

CHAPTER III

THE winter passed, and Roche came no nearer to making good his boast. The meaning of Saligia was as obscure as ever. He acquired in the course of his search an immense quantity of totally useless knowledge. He studied, for instance, the terminology of mediæval alchemy. He worried his way through several ancient books on astrology, hoping to

find his word in the jargon of that science. He explored the criminal slang of every country civilized enough to have criminals. He spent an immense amount of time and irritating brain work over systems of secret writing until he felt equal to deciphering the most subtle code. But he came on nothing which even promised to make sense of Saligia. He might have given up the chase, though he was an obstinate man, but for two things which goaded him on.

From time to time he received letters from the Grand Duchess asking him to report progress. She told him that her precious amber beads assured her again and again that the secret would be discovered. They even said in the most definite way that he, Roche, would be the fortunate discoverer. He had no belief whatever in the beads, but the Grand Duchess's faith in him moved him to fresh efforts. He had a strong liking for the old lady, and was interested in her. As he read letter after letter he felt that she was likely to go mad if the meaning of Saligia were not found. She wrote passionately of her devotion to her royal house, to her country, whose only hope of happiness lay in the restoration of a king, and of her intense hatred of the Communists who ruled Dravadia. Loyalty and patriotism occasionally

drive men beyond reason. Hatred of Jews—the Dravidian Communists were all Jews—often amounts in Eastern Europe to a form of insanity. When loyalty, patriotism and Jew-hatred all together take possession of a mind, the distance to the doors of a madhouse is not great.

The Grand Duchess wrote for the most part in English, a language which served her well enough for patriotic rhapsodies and the rhetoric of loyalty. It failed her sometimes when she wanted to express her hatred of Jews. Then she peppered long passages of her letters with German words. Sometimes Roche could find them in dictionaries. Sometimes the dictionaries failed him, and he discovered the meaning in the books of criminal slang which he had studied. The Grand Duchess's command of the language of vituperation was striking. Occasionally, when even German and the argot of thieves' kitchens were too mild for her feelings, she fell back on her native Dravidian. Then Roche could only guess her meaning. Being a man of modest mind, he did not want to do more than guess. But it became plain to him that if could not find Saligia for her the old lady would become a violent maniac.

The other person who kept Roche up to his work was the King. Roche received many

invitations to Ballysax House, and at last it came to be understood that whenever he chose to go there his room would be ready for him. As long as the hunting lasted there was also a horse at his disposal, a much better horse than the one which his sporting doctor friend had lent him. The King talked no more about his own affairs, the monarchy of Dravidia, or the Grand Duchess Olga. But he always made inquiries about the search for Saligia. He said frankly that his interest in the subject was purely academic. He knew where the crown was. All he wanted to find out was how the Archimandrite conveyed or tried to convey the secret.

Now and then the King offered suggestions. Roche was suspicious of them. He thought it likely that the King would deliberately set him off hunting a wrong scent. But occasionally the King's ideas seemed so plausible that Roche dared not neglect them. He suggested, for instance, that Saligia might be the name of a vestment worn by priests of the Dravidian Church, something corresponding to a cope, a dalmatic, a tunicle, or an alb. There are a considerable number of monographs on ecclesiastical costumes, and the library of Trinity College, Dublin, contains them all. There are also passages on this fascinating subject scat-

tered through various books on ritual and kindred subjects. Roche, who was a very rapid reader, forced his way through an immense amount of printed matter without coming on a single account of the garments worn by priests of the Dravidian Church. He made a note of the fact that there is no monograph on the subject, and determined, if ever he found leisure again, to write one. There is no surer way of winning a reputation for scholarship than to make a corner in some neglected subject; and Roche always wanted to be regarded as a scholar.

The King no doubt enjoyed twitting his guest with his want of success. That is just the kind of mild humour which suits an Irish country gentleman, because it can be kept going for months without the slightest strain on the faculty of invention. The effect on Roche was to make him more determined than ever to track out the elusive Saligia.

In the end he came on the word in a place which was certainly unexpected, at a time when he was thinking of something totally different.

He was in his place in the college chapel one fine Sunday morning in May. Roche went to chapel occasionally because the Provost thought that the junior fellows ought to take

part in the public worship of the college. But Roche, when he got there, felt in no way bound to pay attention to what was going on. By long practice he had acquired a faculty of entirely abstracting his mind while the sermon was being preached. Thus, having a fairly comfortable seat, he was able to think undisturbed about agreeable things such as hunting and golf. He rather liked long sermons, and resented being roused from his daydreams at the end of twenty minutes.

On that particular Sunday he enjoyed an unusually long sermon. The preacher was an elderly country parson who had been fetched up from the wilds of Connaught to preach in the College Chapel because he had done what Roche wanted to do, made a corner in an obscure kind of learning. The man had spent a long life studying the devotional literature of later mediæval monasticism. He knew things which hardly anybody else in the world knew, and he seized the opportunity for spreading them out before an assembly of undergraduates when he found himself in the pulpit of the College Chapel.

Roche did not listen to one word of the sermon for the first half-hour. Then he sat up with a start. The preacher uttered the word *Saligia*, and it penetrated the protective

shield which Roche had set between his ear and his understanding. At first he thought that his imagination had been playing him a trick, so impossible did it seem that the word could occur in a sermon. But the preacher repeated it again. He spoke of the "Saligia order," which differed, so it appeared, from the order favoured by Leo the Great. He commented, it seemed to Roche with some asperity, on the fact that the Saligia list was not the same as that made by Cassian. At last he quoted a hexameter :

"*Æternam vitam si vis saligia vita.*"—"If you wish for eternal life," he translated, "avoid Saligia."

Then with an air of bland satisfaction, as if he had summed up the whole matter and reached an important conclusion, he ended his sermon, gave the benediction, and left the pulpit.

For the first time in his life Roche was sorry that he had not listened to a sermon. But the mistake was not irreparable. Here was a man who actually knew what Saligia meant. All Roche had to do was to ask him.

The preacher, as soon as the service was over, toddled off to eat his luncheon at the Provost's table. Roche had to wait till that feast was over.

He went to his rooms, excited and worried. Saligia seemed to have an attraction for men who made bad hexameters. The one he heard from the pulpit was nearly as faulty as the Archimandrite's. But those who understood the word, the Archimandrite and this preacher, took very different views of it. The Archimandrite said that it must be sought for by anyone who wished for a crown. Roche's mind went back again to his original theory that the inscription on the pectoral cross was a pious motto. The preacher, or the author of his hexameter, took the view that a man's one chance of winning eternal life was to avoid Saligia. Theologians differ, of course, but it seemed odd that they should differ so completely as this on so fundamental a subject.

When he thought the Provost's luncheon must be over, or nearly over, Roche left his rooms and lurked about in College Green. His patience was rewarded. The elderly country parson shambled out of the stately gate of the Provost's house. Roche pounced on him.

"Will you allow me," he said, "to ask you a question about your sermon this morning, a deeply interesting sermon, in which I may truly say I was thrilled."

The elderly parson gurgled with pleasure and appreciation. Never before in the course

of his life had he met anyone who took the smallest interest in his pet subject.

“That word Saligia,” said Roche.

“Ah, Saligia,” said the parson. “I have unfortunately not been able to establish the exact date when the word came into use, nor the place of its origin. Though I expect—indeed, I have reasons which almost justify me in asserting positively—that it was the invention of Fra Benedict Franz of Lutensis, better known as Ovis Divinus, whose Pascal hymn, beginning, ‘O pecus, pecus Domini, quod salutaris nomini,’ is still sung at complines on the second Wednesday after Easter.”

The old gentleman was launched on the river of his favourite subject, and was borne swiftly on. He talked faster and faster. He walked faster and faster. Roche could not manage to interrupt the talk. He was only just able to keep up with the walk. He heard all that was known about the divine sheep of Lutensis, his abominable rhyme, and the reasons which exist for supposing that he invented the word Saligia. He heard, with growing confusion of mind, that *invidia* had somehow slipped into the place originally belonging to *vana gloria*; that *accedia* had been in and out of place, like a Prime Minister of doubtful popularity, but had finally established itself,

thanks chiefly to that *Ovis Divinus*, if it were indeed he who had composed the word.

"But," said Roche, grasping the parson firmly by the arm, "what is Saligia?"

The parson stopped and looked at him in astonishment.

"I explained that fully in my sermon," he said.

"I dare say you did," said Roche, "but I wasn't listening. Of course, I'm sorry and all that. I apologize. I ought to have listened. But the plain fact is I didn't. And I have reasons, urgent private reasons, for wanting to know what Saligia is. Please tell me."

No preacher, not even the humblest, likes to hear that his sermon has not been listened to.

"But," he said, "you told me that you were interested, even thrilled——"

"And I am," said Roche. "I can't tell you how thrilled. I've been chasing that damned word for six months, and you're the first person I've met who knows it."

"Please," said the clergyman, "refrain from the use of profane language while talking to me."

"I will," said Roche, "I'll refrain from anything if you'll only tell me what Saligia is."

"Saligia," said the clergyman,— "and if you had listened to my sermon you would not have

had to ask the question,—Saligia is a mnemonic word made up of the initials of the Latin names of the Seven Deadly Sins. S, *superbia* or pride; A, *avaritia* or avarice——”

Roche was too much astonished to speak. The clergyman droned quietly on.

“—L, *luxuria* or lust; I, *ira*, anger; G, *gula*, gluttony; I, again, *invidia* or envy; A, *acedia*, which our older writers call accidie.”

“My God!” gasped Roche at last.

The clergyman drew away. He suspected that he had been waylaid by a blasphemous lunatic.

“I’m damned,” said Roche.

The clergyman walked off stiffly, leaving Roche standing in the middle of St. Stephen’s Green.

CHAPTER IV

ROCHE sat down on one of the seats provided for the weary in St. Stephen’s Green. He sat at the side of a shallow artificial pond in which ducks of various kinds and colours swim about for the delight of the public. They are an engaging sight, and many Dublin

people sit for hours every day looking at them. Roche did not pay the smallest attention to them. Their feathers were gay, but had they been as bright as birds of paradise he would not have noticed them. He was too much bewildered to be interested in ducks.

For months he had searched for the meaning of Saligia. He had found it and it seemed to make no possible sense. What could the Seven Deadly Sins have to do with the hiding place of the Dravidian crown?

By degrees the sheer bewilderment gave way to a sense of irritation. Roche felt that he had made a fool of himself. That was bad enough. He also felt that other people had made a fool of him. That was worse. The Grand Duchess, the ex-King, who was also Mr. Donovan, the preacher in the College Chapel, and Fra Benedict Franz, better known as the Divine Sheep, had all banded themselves together to make Mr. Dermot Drelincourt Roche, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, look ridiculous. That was how he felt—irrationally, of course—and he was naturally angry. He rose at last and went back towards the college. He wanted to hide himself in his own rooms.

For a man in a bad temper nothing could possibly have been more trying than Roche's progress back to the college.

At the top of Grafton Street he met the clever lady who taught in the girls' school and spent her time working out puzzles. She was on her way to St. Patrick's Cathedral and was already a little late; but she stopped when she met Roche.

"Oh, Mr. Roche," she said, "I'm so glad to meet you. That word you were asking about—Saligia—it isn't exactly an acrostic, but I wasn't far wrong. I happened to be in the College Chapel this morning, in the ladies' gallery, and the preacher said——"

"I know," said Roche, and left her abruptly.

He did not want to be told about the Seven Deadly Sins again.

Half-way down the street he came up against the assistant librarian, the man who said Saligia was a hairwash.

"By the way, Roche," he said, "I've found out all about that Saligia word of yours. I saw you in Chapel this morning but I know you never listen to sermons, so I dare say you didn't hear the preacher saying——"

"Ass," said Roche, and hurried on.

The assistant librarian was deeply hurt. Anyone would be who thought that he was conferring a benefit on a friend and found himself greeted with unexpected abuse.

Luck set steadily against Roche that day.

At the bottom of the street he was greeted by the Gaelic scholar, who said that Saligia was not an Irish place name.

"I say, Roche," he said, "You remember that theory of yours that Saligia was the name of a place in Ireland? I told you at the time you were wrong. Well, I've just met a man who was in College Chapel this morning. He's been on the look-out for you ever since, and he told me if I met you to tell you——"

"You needn't tell me any damned thing," said Roche.

"But," said the Gaelic scholar, mildly surprised, "it's about that word of yours, Saligia, the word you've been scouring Dublin to find the meaning of. It turns out to be a mnemonic word made up of the initials——"

"Go to hell," said Roche, "and stay there."

Roche had never much liked that Gaelic scholar; but just then he could not have stood the mention of the Seven Deadly Sins from the person he loved best in the world.

At the very gate of the college he was caught again, this time by the sporting doctor who had mixed up Saligia with Sybillia and the Grand National.

"By the way, Roche," he said, "I was lunching with the Provost to-day. The only other person there was a funny old parson bird,

a sort of rustic Methuselah. He and the Provost were talking nineteen to the dozen about some kind of Latin sheep."

"*Ovis divinus*," said Roche with a groan.

"That's it," said the doctor, "comes into the Georgics somewhere I suppose. I never knew before that the Provost was interested in cattle breeding. I was just going to chip in with a few well-chosen remarks about a Shropshire ram which I saw at the Spring Show when the old parson bird said he strongly suspected that Saligia originated with the *Ovis Divinus*."

"I know, I know," said Roche. "Don't tell me again unless you want to drive me mad."

"Oh, all right," said the doctor a little huffily. "I only mentioned the matter because I thought you'd like to know that you were probably right after all in saying that Saligia was a disease. Nothing else could possibly originate in a Latin sheep. If I were you I'd ask some vet. about it. That's to say if you're still keen to know, though I don't see why you should be. Diseases of sheep are dull things."

Roche reached his rooms at last. He bolted the door and flung himself down in his deepest chair. For awhile his irritation prevented him thinking clearly. By degrees he recovered himself sufficiently to light a pipe. The tobacco soothed him slightly. He smoked rapidly. A

second pipe still further soothed him, and he sat for a time with a kind of amazed stupor. The two hexameters repeated themselves over and over again in his mind.

“*Æternam vitam si vis saligia vita.*”

That was perfectly sound advice, just the sort of platitude which might be expected from Fra Benedict Franz, very properly nicknamed the Divine Sheep. If you want eternal life keep clear of the Seven Deadly Sins. Exactly. And if you want to escape running into debt live within your income, and if you want——Polonius, another Divine Sheep, had scores of such maxims on the tip of his tongue.

“*Si vis coronam saligia prima petenda.*”

If you want a crown, presumably a heavenly crown, you must first seek for the Seven Deadly Sins. That was what the Dravidian Archimandrite said. Or was that what the Archimandrite said? The Grand Duchess maintained strongly that he was not speaking of a heavenly, but of an earthly crown, the crown of Dravidia. If so——

A gleam of light came suddenly to Roche.

If you want the crown of Dravidia you must first seek out, pursue, no doubt practise the Deadly Sins, all Seven of them. Was this Archimandrite a grim joker, bent on pointing out through this cryptic hexameter of his that

the road to a throne, especially to the Dravidian throne, lay through an entanglement of all the worst sins there are ?

The ex-King, Mr. Donovan of Ballysax House, prophesied trouble, very serious trouble, for any one who found the crown of Dravidia. The Archimandrite, it appeared, anticipated trouble for anyone who sought it, if indeed sins are troublesome. Many people find them pleasant.

In any case, whether the way to the crown were tiresome or pleasant, righteous or wicked, Roche had very little doubt that the Grand Duchess would walk it without hesitation if only it plainly and certainly led to the crown.

That was the trouble about this hexameter of the Archimandrite's. No doubt it is true that only by extreme wickedness can a crown (earthly) be secured. But it is evidently possible to sin in a vast variety of ways without arriving at a crown. Many people do.

That, however, was the Grand Duchess's affair. Roche's business was to let her know that he had discovered the meaning of her word.

He wrote her a letter.

It was not a very long letter. He set down exactly what Saligia was, giving a list of the Seven Deadly Sins in Latin and English, in case the Grand Duchess did not know them. He

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did not think it necessary to describe how he came to make his discovery. He shrank from any mention of the Divine Sheep, for whom he felt an acute dislike. He did not offer any advice about the way to use the new-found knowledge of the meaning of Saligia. He had no suggestion to make as to how the Deadly Sins could lead to the Dravidian crown. He was naturally unwilling to recommend the Grand Duchess to start practising them all at once, though that was apparently what the Archimandrite wanted her to do.

One or two of them she already practised regularly. Ira, for instance, was part of her ordinary life. She lived in a state of perpetual rage against the Dravidian Communists, and worked off her passion on her maid, unless the girl happened to be ill. *Superbia* would offer no difficulty to her. In spite of her shabby clothes and her coarse language there was a good deal of the aristocrat about her. But *acedia*, which means a kind of nerveless torpor, a complete and habitual dislike of exertion of any kind, was quite foreign to the Grand Duchess's nature. Roche could not believe that she would ever become an adept at this particular sin, no matter how hard she tried, and she would try hard for the sake of winning the crown. She also seemed rather past the age at

which *Luxuria*—which the best authorities translate lust—is a serious temptation ; while gluttony was certainly not the besetting sin of a lady who cheerfully gave up her own dinner in order to feed a sick maid on scalding gruel and tabloids of aspirin.

Roche's letter took six days to reach Budapest. If it had been a newspaper it would have done the journey in three, and been delivered on the fourth day at latest. A post card from London reaches its destination in five days, taking a day longer than a newspaper because it is mixed up with letters in the post bag. Letters take six days, because a letter may possibly contain money, English or American notes. The Hungarian postal authorities like to make sure about the contents of a letter before they deliver it. It is commonly said that the importation of money into Hungary is strictly forbidden, a remarkable instance of the protection of a native industry. Whether this is really a fact no one knows for certain ; but it is quite plain that an English Treasury note ought not to be delivered to a member of the general public, perhaps a quite unworthy person, when it might benefit an underpaid official in the Hungarian postal service. Since the opening, examining and closing of letters takes time, they are slower than either post

cards or newspapers in reaching their destination.

On the seventh day, Monday morning, Roche received, as a reply to his letter, a most amazing telegram.

“Thousands of thanks. God save the King. Join me in Budapest as soon as possible.—
OLGA.”

That gave Roche something to think about. It was evident that the Grand Duchess was entirely satisfied with the interpretation of Saligia. She had got exactly what she wanted. She would not offer thousands of thanks unless she had. She saw her way clearly to laying her hands on the crown. That must be her meaning of her “God save the King.” She would not telegraph such a thing unless she felt certain of setting up a King in Dravidia again. These were puzzles enough to keep his mind busy. But a more exciting mystery remained. Why did she want him to join her in Budapest?

He hesitated. The thought of a possible adventure attracted him. The fear that the Grand Duchess had simply gone mad gave him pause. He went about his work that day with a distracted mind. He delivered two lectures

to honours' students which should have been on Aristotle's Ethics, but were occupied chiefly with the Seven Deadly Sins. In the notebook of one of the more intelligent students the following entry was afterwards found: "Re ethical standard of the Greek city states: Is the desire of a crown to be reckoned as avaritia when the original impulse is patriotic?" This gives some indication of what Roche's lectures were like that day.

Next morning he got another telegram.

"Shall expect you by Orient Express leaving London Thursday. Count Imre commands forces.—OLGA."

That made up Roche's mind for him. The Grand Duchess might be mad, but her madness was of a coherent kind. She had thought out his journey for him. If, as seemed likely, she contemplated invading Dravidia, she had at least secured some forces and a general to command them. Roche had never heard of Count Imre, but he sounded warlike. All Counts in Eastern Europe are born fighters and all thoroughly understand revolutions, their cause and cure.

Roche made arrangements with one of his colleagues to complete the series of lectures on

Aristotle's Ethics; and packed a suitcase. Then he went out and bought a revolver from an officer in the Free State Army. It seemed likely that he would want a weapon of the sort while serving under Count Imre.

On Wednesday morning he received another telegram :

“Secrecy imperative. Mention meaning of word to no one. Can you ride a bicycle? Cable reply.—OLGA.”

Roche cabled at once :

“Can ride either motor or push bicycle. Secret secure here.”

He felt justified in saying that, although all Dublin was discussing the meaning of Saligia. No one knew why he wanted to find out the meaning of Saligia. He could not himself imagine what use it was now he had got it. It was not likely that anyone else, anyone who had never heard of Dravidia or the Grand Duchess would be able to make a dangerous guess.

There was, of course, Mr. Donovan of Ballysax House. Roche had written to him as soon as he received the Grand Duchess's first telegram, and had told him that the meaning of the word

was found. But Mr. Donovan was likely to be as keen as the Grand Duchess herself on keeping the secret. He, of all men, was least anxious for the finding of the crown.

On Wednesday evening Roche left Dublin for London by the night mail.

Just as the train was starting from Westland Row Station a breathless porter from the College dashed up with a telegram for Mr. Roche. It was from Mr. Donovan.

“*Qui vult coronam, vult et certe dolorem.* Give my love to Aunt Olga.”

That hexameter, at all events, was easy enough to understand. Mr. Donovan had warned him before that looking for the Dravidian crown was the same thing as looking for trouble. But Roche was tuned up for adventure. He crumpled up the telegram and dropped it out of the window.

CHAPTER I

THERE is a song, highly moral and therefore not very popular, which urges us to consider the good which comes to us in life rather than the evil. The chorus, constantly repeated, consists chiefly of the words, "Count your blessings."

Karl Gyorgy, Chairman of the Committee of Public Safety, and the real ruler of Dravidia, did not know that song. If he had known it and had followed the advice given, he might have been a happier man than he was.

He had many "blessings." In the first place he had a title, which is a thing generally regarded as very gratifying. He was styled "Excellenz" by those who addressed him. When sending notes to the English High Commissioner he described himself as the Right Honourable. In communicating with Germans

or Austrians he was Hoch Wohlgeborener. In French, still the language of diplomacy, he was Son Altesse. That was pleasant and he enjoyed it none the less because he had given these titles to himself, as indeed he had given himself the name by which the world knew him. Before the revolution he had been Jacob Kuhn, brother of Otto Kuhn the financier.

More substantial was the blessing of material comfort. He lived in what had been the King's private suite of rooms in the palace in Csaka, the capital city of Dravidia. Excellent meals were served to him there with wine from the royal cellar. He was attended by the late King's valet, a man who knew his job thoroughly. His office, once the King's smoking-room, was furnished with a view to comfort by King Michael, who understood what comfort is and was expert in attaining it. His Excellency, the Right Honourable Karl, was wise enough to make as few changes as possible in the furniture and arrangements of the room. But there were one or two changes which he regretted, but had been unable to avoid. The legs of two of the leather-covered arm-chairs were broken. That happened one evening during a prolonged meeting of the Committee of Public Safety. The royal Tokay, of which a little had been drunk by the members of the committee,

turned out to be much stronger than anyone suspected, and the chairs suffered. The carpet was a good deal stained by members of deputations who, very properly, asserted the rights of free citizens to spit where they chose. The Committee of Public Safety no longer held its meetings in that room, and deputations were received in a hall from which the carpet had been removed.

Karl Gyorgy—His Excellency the Right Honourable—also enjoyed the blessing of power. He could do very nearly what he liked and no one in Dravidia dared to interfere with him. Pressure from foreign states affected him very little because his Government was only half recognized, and there were no properly accredited Legations in Csaka. There was indeed a Frenchman, supposed in some way to represent his Government, but he did nothing except organize the Dravidian Red Army, and Karl Gyorgy, who knew very little about soldiering, liked having that done for him. There was also a British High Commissioner, Sir Almeric Cloote. But Karl Gyorgy was not very much afraid of him.

“Sir Almeric,” he said once, “is a man of more bounce than brains.”

To anyone of Karl Gyorgy’s astuteness it seemed easy enough to manage this Englishman.

Sir Almeric was fond of sport, as most Englishmen are. Karl Gyorgy believed that he cared for nothing else, and that so long as sport was provided for him he would give no trouble. Dravidia is full of wild creatures which can be shot. There is a marshy district near the frontier which is full of wild geese in early winter. There are mountains where deer wander about, deer with large branching horns. There are brown bears to be found, and wild boars. Sir Almeric was invited to kill these creatures whenever he chose, and Karl Gyorgy believed that when absorbed in his sport he would speedily forget any little matter about which he threatened to trouble the Dravidian Government.

The system did not always work satisfactorily, and Karl Gyorgy used to complain that it would have been easier to deal with a man with more brains.

"The English," he said, "look like fools and act like fools and are fools, but if you treat them as fools they become troublesome."

There was one matter about which Sir Almeric was particularly difficult to manage, the execution of recalcitrant peasants in the Palace Platz. Karl Gyorgy could not understand how a man, who himself delighted in shooting geese and bears, should object to some

one else shooting peasants. But not even the opportunity of slaughtering hundreds of wild geese seemed to reconcile Sir Almeric to the shooting of half a dozen peasants.

Sir Almeric's perpetual protests became after a time very annoying to Karl Gyorgy. It was necessary to shoot peasants in considerable numbers. They were so obstinate and indifferent to the welfare of their country that they refused to sell their corn and potatoes for the only money which Karl Gyorgy had to offer them. It was nice clean paper money, with very pretty pictures on it. But the peasants would not take it, no matter how many naughts Karl Gyorgy had printed after the index figure. Therefore it was necessary to shoot them. The executions took place in the Palace Platz for several reasons. The windows of the King's smoking-room, the room occupied by Karl Gyorgy, looked out on the Platz, so that Karl could see the shooting done, which gratified him. The Platz was the centre of the city's life so every one else could see the executions. This convinced the townspeople, who were often very hungry, that the Government was really doing its best to get food.

At the far side of the Platz, exactly opposite the smoking-room window, was the cathedral.

The condemned men were stood in rows against its north wall, a very convenient arrangement, because the wall was high and thick. If the firing party shot a little wildly, as Red soldiers sometimes will, even after French training, the bullets did not go whistling about the city at the risk of killing the wrong people. The cathedral wall stopped them, and no doubt saved many lives more or less valuable to the public.

It was to this shooting that Sir Almeric objected, and his protests were continual, a form of nagging which greatly annoyed Karl Gyorgy.

The peasants also objected, which annoyed Karl Gyorgy even more.

The Dravidian peasant is naturally a submissive man and thoroughly loyal to his Government. He has no great objection to seeing his relatives shot. He does not make much fuss about being shot himself. But he likes the thing done under proper authority, that is to say under the crown, the actual emerald studded crown of the Dravidian Kingdom. If Karl Gyorgy could have produced that, he might have shot as many peasants as he liked without exciting the protests of anyone except the British High Commissioner. The trouble was that owing to the cunning of the late King

and the obstinacy of the Archimandrite, the crown could not be found.

Things became difficult and Karl Gyorgy grew uneasy. He had two armed guards at the door of his room, two more at the end of the corridor which led to it, six at the entrance of the royal suite, and another hundred and fifty scattered about the palace. The leaders of great popular movements have to be even more careful about their safety than the kings who preceded them. King Michael never had more than a guard at the palace gate, and it existed chiefly for the purpose of saluting him when he went in and out.

Karl Gyorgy stood at the window of his room, a large mullioned window with a south aspect. He looked out over the Palace Platz, lately renamed Liberty Square. There was an execution going on, the execution of five peasants suspected of having concealed more than two tons of potatoes which the Government wanted very badly. They preferred being shot to telling where the potatoes lay, and they were shot. But Karl Gyorgy watched the execution with less pleasure than usual. He was worried, because he was beginning to see that a change of policy was necessary. He did not mean to stop shooting peasants. He must continue to do that until the stupid animals

learned to part with their food. But, partly because of the nagging of the British High Commissioner and partly because the people were becoming restive, he thought it wise to give up public executions in Liberty Square. For the future, so he planned, the peasants should be hanged quietly in their own villages, without ostentation or noise.

Long after the execution was over and the bodies carted away, Karl Gyorgy still stood at his window staring out across the square at the cathedral.

Any cathedral is out of place in a Communist state. The Cathedral of Csaka was actually offensive. It was a huge building with a tower which stood up higher than anything else in the town. Its very size and height suggested that there was some one—human or divine—who was housed better and deserved a better house than the ordinary citizens of the state. That is an idea which no true Communist can be expected to tolerate, unless he himself is a superior being, and lives in a big house as Karl Gyorgy did. The crosses—there were at least a dozen of them sticking up all over the cathedral—were another offence. They witnessed to the idea that martyrdom sometimes triumphed over force. Karl Gyorgy felt that, in some way, these crosses inspired the passive resistance of

the peasants which had so far defeated the executions.

For these and other reasons Karl Gyorgy disliked the cathedral. But hitherto he had allowed it to exist because its north wall served a useful purpose in stopping the bullets of the firing party. If there were to be no more firing parties in Liberty Square the cathedral was of no further value to the Republic, and became simply a perpetual source of annoyance to Karl Gyorgy. He considered the possibility of pulling it down, but that would be tiresome and expensive, because the thing was built with obstinate solidity. It could not be blown up without endangering the palace and most of the town. It occurred suddenly to Karl Gyorgy that it might be turned into a Cinema House, where films could be displayed illustrative of the glories of Communism and the folly of the Christian faith. If such exhibitions were given free——

Karl Gyorgy felt that he had hit on a really hopeful plan.

It was clearly the business of the Minister of Education, Culture and Public Morals to look after cinema displays. Karl Gyorgy sent for him.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Public Morals, was Count Munsky, an elderly,

somewhat feeble-minded member of the old Dravidian aristocracy who had joined the revolutionaries because his wife, an exuberant young woman, owed more money than he could possibly pay. He was given a seat in the Cabinet of the new Government because it was supposed that the rest of Europe might believe in the good intentions of the Communists if they saw the name of a real Count in the list of Ministers. He was given charge of Education, Culture and Public Morals because he could not possibly do any harm in that department. There was very little education, less culture, and no public morals in Dravidia at that time.

While waiting for the Count, Karl Gyorgy wrote a letter to Sir Almeric Cloote. It was not a very clever letter, but he thought it was clever enough to deceive a stupid Englishman. He began by saying that he had decided to execute no more peasants, being convinced by the humanitarian arguments, so persuasively put forward by the British High Commissioner. He said that he wished in every way to meet the wishes of the English people, whom he recognized as the friends of the Dravidian Republic. His promise to stop the executions was unconditional, but he went on to describe the difficulty of persuading the peasants to sell their food for Dravidian money. That

difficulty would be overcome if the money had some real value outside Dravidia. If England, moved by the reports of the High Commissioner, could be induced to lend a small sum—ten million pounds would be enough—the Dravidian currency would at once rise in value and the difficulties of the Government would be over.

Karl Gyorgy finished and signed the letter. He might get the loan if, as he believed, Sir Almeric was not clever enough to guess that the money would be used partly to pay the Red Army, partly for the good of Karl Gyorgy and his fellow Ministers.

He next set to work on a Proclamation addressed to the peasants. It began with an eloquent appeal to their patriotism. They had no patriotism, and Karl Gyorgy knew it, but he appealed to it all the same. Then he reminded them of their love for the new Republic, though he was perfectly well aware that they hated it. He promised that there would be no more executions on Liberty Square. He said that Great Britain had promised to lend twenty million pounds to the Republic and that the Dravidian dekka would immediately rise to its original value.

The dekka is the monetary unit of Dravidia, and in the normal times, before the revolution, was worth about tenpence. After Karl Gyorgy's

Government had been in power for eighteen months it was possible to buy a million and a half dekkas for a pound. If the peasants could be persuaded that the dekka would soon be worth tenpence again they would certainly sell their food and take to hoarding the Republican paper instead of their own potatoes. Karl Gyorgy wanted to persuade them. He was composing his Proclamation with that exact object.

He knew that he had no easy task. The Dravidian peasant, like every other peasant in the world, is deeply suspicious and has an inbred distrust of paper money. Karl Gyorgy sat pen in hand trying to hit on telling phrases, phrases which would bring home to the peasant the splendid possibility of future wealth.

"Five thousand dekkas," he wrote, "the price of two eggs to-day, will be worth two hundred English pounds the day the negotiations for the new loan are completed. That is to say the number of eggs which could then be repurchased——"

This was a telling line of argument, likely to impress the peasant mind. Karl Gyorgy was greatly pleased with it. He took a sheet of scribbling paper from the desk in front of him and began to calculate how many eggs could be purchased for two hundred English pounds in

a market where eggs cost 2,550 Dravidian dekkas each, the dekkas standing at one and a half millions to the £ (nominal).

That was not an easy sum to do, and Karl Gyorgy never finished it. He was interrupted by hearing the sentries at the far end of the corridor challenge loudly. The discipline of the Palace Guard was very good, thanks to their French military instructor. They challenged strangers with a most impressive staccato shout, something between the bellow of a bull cut off abruptly, and the bark of a large dog in a bad temper. They bumped the butts of their rifles on the floor with a heavy thud, raised the weapons again with a clang, and stamped their feet loudly. These military noises made Karl Gyorgy nervous. He knew that the sentries would not challenge Count Munsky, whom they knew perfectly well. Some stranger must be trying to gain admission to his room.

Karl Gyorgy laid down his pen and took a revolver from a drawer in front of him. He was a man who hated fire-arms and was very nearly as much afraid of his own revolver as he was of a strange visitor. He laid the weapon carefully on the blotter in front of him and waited.

Five minutes later there was another loud challenge, this time from the sentry immedi-

ately outside his door. The stranger, whoever he was, had passed the outer guards. Karl Gyorgy waited in nervous agitation. The sound of a muttered conversation reached him. The words were inaudible, but it was plain that the stranger was being questioned and his credentials examined.

Then the door was opened and a sallow-faced young man was shown in. Karl Gyorgy knew him at once and all his nervousness vanished. It was the same sallow-faced young man whom Otto Kuhn had dispatched from Budapest with the letter containing the Archimandrite's cryptic hexameter.

Karl Gyorgy rose with a smile of welcome, shook the young man's hand warmly, and led him to a chair beside the stove. He shared his brother's fondness for high temperatures. The glow of heat which came from the stove emphasized the warmth of his greeting.

CHAPTER II

THE young man took a penknife from his pocket and slit the lining of his coat under his left armpit. After fumbling about

for a minute in the padding above his shoulder he drew out Otto Kuhn's letter, a good deal crumpled but with its seals intact. He carried the letter there because the Customs Officers in Eastern Europe sometimes search travellers very thoroughly. There was an American lady—the story of her wrongs roused Indianapolis and St. Louis to fury—who was made to take off her stockings because she was suspected of smuggling dollars, her own dollars, out of a country which wanted them badly. There was an Englishman who was imprisoned for a week because he said a whisky bottle contained hair-wash. It was the Customs Officers themselves, not their Government, who wanted the whisky. The Englishman went to jail because he objected to their taking it. Otto Kuhn's messenger ran no unnecessary risk. The shoulder padding of shabby coats is seldom searched, unless the lining shows signs of having been tampered with.

Karl Gyorgy took the letter and read it eagerly. It was a long letter, but he read it through with careful attention. The part about the discovery of the hexameter he read through twice over while the sallow young man sat silent, sweating gently in the heat of the stove. At last Karl Gyorgy turned to him. He thanked him warmly for bringing the letter safely, presented him with a large cigar, and sent him off

under the charge of a secretary to be given the best available luncheon. The young man, who rather hoped to have his travelling expenses paid over again, was disappointed; but he was far too wise to grumble.

Karl Gyorgy sat down at his table radiant with joy. The secret of the hiding-place of the crown was in his hands. His brother and the fool of an Englishman in Budapest had failed to discover the meaning of the hexameter. Karl Gyorgy had no intention of failing. He knew no Latin himself, but there were plenty of people in Dravidia who did. He fully expected to have the crown in his hands in twenty-four hours.

Then——

Then he could execute as many peasants as he liked. That reminded him of the nagging English High Commissioner. He would be able to laugh at that imbecile when he had the crown in his hands. He picked up the letter he had written half an hour before, tore it into tiny pieces and scattered them about the floor. He was a man of emotional temperament and it gratified him to express his contempt for Sir Almeric Cloote by rending the promises of amendment which that gentleman had extracted from him. He also tore up the draft of his Proclamation to the Dravidian peasants. There

would be no need now of any such document. When he came to his calculation about the price of eggs he deliberately spat on the paper and threw it into the waste paper-basket.

Having relieved his feelings he fell to thinking of all he could do when he got the crown. There were the emeralds, stones of immense value. He had not the slightest intention of sharing that treasure with any of his colleagues. He meant to keep it all to himself, with the exception of the per centage which his brother Otto would certainly extort from him. With such a fortune he could live very happily in some warm climate where women, champagne and rich food, are procurable in large quantities without much trouble.

Or he might remain where he was and govern Dravidia as a Dictator, even as a King. There was no reason whatever why he should not be a king if he chose. The price of the emeralds would set up a respectable Court and build a good opera house. The revenues of Dravidia, collected as Karl Gyorgy thought he could collect them, would keep the court going and pay a handsome subsidy to the opera. Karl Gyorgy was very fond of music, almost as fond of it as he was of rich food and plump women. He understood and appreciated it as most Eastern Europeans do. His opera, if he estab-

lished it, would rival that of Vienna, and Karl Gyorgy himself, his uniform ablaze with medals and orders, would sit in the Royal box and share with the tenor, the prima donna and the conductor of the orchestra—the cheers of great audiences.

His pleasant day dreams were interrupted by the arrival of Count Munsky, the Minister of Education, Culture and Public morals. The old gentleman was exquisitely dressed, as he had been all his life. His white hair was smoothy brushed back on his head. He looked what he was, an aristocrat. He tottered across the floor with one delicate hand outstretched towards Karl Gyorgy. The other was laid palm inward on his waistcoat as if he meant to bow. There was a dubious smile, intended to be ingratiating on his pale old face. Besides looking like a gentleman he looked like a suppliant, and that was what he meant to be. He wanted money, a larger salary, a bonus, a present, a tip, a bribe, money in any form, so long as there was plenty of it. His wife had been more extravagant than usual. The value of the dekka was falling fast. The cost of living was rising even faster. The Count wanted money very badly.

Karl Gyorgy greeted his colleague without rising, without appearing to notice the out-

stretched hand. In early life he had often been snubbed by people whom he took for aristocrats. It gratified him now to be in a position to snub a member of the hated class. The Count accepted the snub, standing meekly in front of Karl Gyorgy's desk, until at last he was invited to sit down.

Karl Gyorgy explained his plan for turning the cathedral into a cinema house. The Count hesitated and stammered out a fear that public opinion might resent such a change. Karl Gyorgy thought not. He suggested, with a leer and a wink, that the films exhibited should be of a kind likely to reconcile the ordinary man to the desecration of a cathedral, and at the same time of value in educating the public in the new morality. The Count still hesitated. In fact he hesitated more than he did at first. The thought of Karl Gyorgy's educative films in a cathedral half frightened him. He mentioned that there were still religious services held in the cathedral at night, by priests who pretended not to be priests in the daytime. He himself occasionally attended these services when his wife's parties were unpleasantly boisterous. But he did not mention this.

Karl Gyorgy, who was tired of talking about the cathedral, cut the matter short by saying that a large expenditure would be required for

the necessary structural alterations in the building and that the Count, as Minister of Public Morals, would have the handling of the money. He knew all about the Countess's extravagance and could have told to a dekka how much the Count owed. He supposed that an offer of money would silence the murmured scruples of the old gentleman. He was perfectly right. It did. The Count bowed a grateful acquiescence in the new scheme, and, the matter being settled, rose to take his leave.

But Karl Gyorgy had not quite done with him. The secret of the hiding-place of the crown must be carefully kept, but he was forced to ask some one to translate the Latin for him. Count Munsky was a foolish old man, very unlikely to guess at a connection between the lost crown and the Latin hexameter. If he displayed any curiosity it ought to be quite easy to deceive him. He probably knew Latin. That was just the kind of useless knowledge which an aristocrat might be expected to possess.

"By the way," said Karl Gyorgy, "as you are here would you mind translating a little bit of Latin for me. You know Latin, I suppose?"

"I knew it when I was a boy," said the Count. "I still remember a little, I think."

It was, in fact, very little that he remembered. But he had an old edition of Horace which he

kept by his bedside, because he liked reading one or two of the Odes which were perfectly familiar to him. He was particularly fond of the one in the third book which begins with a description of the upright man of steadfast purpose who remains unterrified though tyrants or democracies threaten him. That was the kind of man Count Munsky would have liked to be. He even thought, quite wrongly, that he might have been that kind of man, if his wife had not run him into debt.

Karl Gyorgy did not, of course, show Otto Kuhn's letter. He copied out the hexameter and handed it to the Count.

Like every one else who had ever read the hexameter, the Count began easily enough :

"If you wish for a crown you must first seek for——"

There, like everybody else, he stuck.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that I don't know what Saligia means. The word is quite strange to me."

"I suppose," said Karl Gyorgy, "you could find it in a dictionary if you had one."

"Oh, of course, of course."

Karl Gyorgy rang the bell on his desk and told his secretary to fetch all the Latin dictionaries he could find in the palace library.

The secretary took some time over the job.

The Count studied the hexameter. His knowledge of Latin, though small, was sufficient to make him doubtful of the scanning of the line. The dactyl and spondee at the end convinced him that it was meant for a hexameter.

"This can hardly come from the *Æneid*," he said, "or even from the *Georgics*. In fact, I don't think the line is Virgil."

"No. It's not Virgil."

"Ah," said the Count, "one of the later Latin poets no doubt."

He said "no doubt," but there were very grave doubts in his mind. Would even the latest and worst of the Latin poets be guilty of the false quantities which stared at him?

"Do you happen to know who the author is?" he asked.

Karl Gyorgy did know, but he had no intention of telling.

"Perhaps a mediæval monk," said the Count. "In fact, I'm inclined to think that it must have been a mediæval monk."

"It wasn't," said Karl Gyorgy.

But he saw that these bare denials were not sufficient. The Count might go on guessing at the author of the lines until he guessed right. His "mediæval monk" was getting uncomfortably near the truth. It seemed wiser to

tell him something—not of course the truth—about the origin of the hexameter.

“The fact is,” said Karl Gyorgy, “that I have good reason to suppose this verse to be part of a seditious royalist correspondence conducted in cipher. It fell into my hands by an accident.”

“Indeed,” said the Count. “But in that case——”

“I need not remind you that the matter must be regarded as absolutely confidential.”

“Of course,” said the Count. “But——”

“The existence of this Latin verse must not be mentioned to anyone. You understand me, not to anyone.”

“Of course not,” said the Count, “but if the verse is part of a cipher——”

“I’ve told you it is,” said Karl Gyorgy, “so there’s no ‘if’ about it. It’s part of a royalist cipher.”

He wanted to stop the Count asking questions about the hexameter.

“All I wish to say,” said the Count mildly, “is that if the verse is part of a cipher we probably shan’t find *Saligia* in a dictionary.”

“Of course we’ll find it in a dictionary,” said Karl Gyorgy, “if it’s a good dictionary.”

Then he remembered the paragraph in his brother’s letter which told how he and Roche

had searched through all the dictionaries in Budapest and failed to find Saligia. But he was not going to admit that the word could baffle him.

"If it's a Latin word," he said firmly, "it must be in a dictionary."

"But," said the Count, "it may not be a Latin word. In fact, it probably isn't."

The secretary came back with his arms full of dictionaries, and it turned out that the Count was right. Not a single dictionary contained the word, or any word the least like it.

"Then how the devil," said Karl Gyorgy, "are we to find out what it means?"

"There's a man in my office," said the Count,—"you sent him to me yourself, I think—who's supposed to be an expert at cryptograms."

There was such a man, a Levantine Greek, who had got into trouble with all the various Governments which controlled his native city since the war. He had been driven to flight at last and took refuge in Csaka, where he offered his services to Karl Gyorgy. He knew all the languages in common use in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor, about forty, and eight or ten more which were spoken only by very few people. He was particularly clever at deciphering secret codes and often boasted that none had yet been devised which could baffle him. The Count

had no doubt, Karl Gyorgy had very little doubt, that this man could interpret Saligia. He was clever enough to interpret anything which had a meaning. That was exactly why Karl Gyorgy did not want to employ him. A very clever man discovers what you want him to discover if you pay him enough. But he very often discovers other things too which you do not want discovered.

"If I were you I should turn that man on to the job," said the Count. "He's sure to be able to manage it. And now what about the alterations in the cathedral that you were speaking about? I'm afraid they may be expensive."

"I'll give you an order for four milliards," said Karl Gyorgy. "That ought to be enough."

"Milliards," said the Count. "Let me see now, just how much is a milliard? Is it a million million or is that a billion? I find it very hard to remember."

Being an elderly man he had never succeeded in getting used to the figures necessary for reckoning money in Eastern Europe since the war. His confusion was pardonable. Very few people are quite sure of the difference between a milliard and a billion. Mistakes are constantly being made in buying expensive things like suits of clothes.

"Can you tell me," said the Count plaintively, "how many naughts there are in a milliard?"

"No, I can't," said Karl Gyorgy. "How on earth do you suppose I can carry that sort of information about in my head? I'm going to give you an order to the fellow who prints the notes for us, an order for four milliard dekkas." He wrote out the order as he spoke, and signed his name with a flourish. "He'll know what to give you. It's his job to know things like that. But if I were you I wouldn't ask him for notes of small denomination. It'll take him a fortnight to print them if you do. These fellows simply won't work, no matter what you pay them, and anyhow, there's a paper shortage; so you'd better take it in notes of a million or so each."

"But," said the Count, "if I put all that money in circulation at once——"

"The dekka will slump again of course," said Karl Gyorgy.

The Count had a most unpleasant recollection of a previous sudden drop in the value of the dekka. He had a hundred thousand of them stored away in a box, believing that he had nearly a hundred pounds, as indeed he had when he laid the dekkas by. When he came to spend them they were only worth about seven

pounds. He did not want that to happen to him again.

"But it doesn't matter to you how they slump," said Karl Gyorgy. "You owe dekkas, and you can't be forced to pay anything except dekkas, even if they're worth nothing at all."

He handed over the order he had signed. The Count took it with a puzzled smile which was meant to express gratitude. He hoped that he would be able to pay his debts, but felt certain that he would not have money enough to do anything to the cathedral. He bowed himself out of Gyorgy's office.

CHAPTER III

KARL GYORGY spent an uneasy week puzzling over Saligia. He was convinced, just as his brother was, just as the Grand Duchess was, that the word concealed the secret of the hiding-place of the crown. It maddened him to feel that he was missing the chance of wealth and fame because he lacked the intelligence to guess a puzzle. It was some little consolation to him to feel that the Grand Duchess had also failed to guess it. But she

was working at it and at any moment might find the solution. He broke into a sweat of agony whenever he thought of all the Grand Duchess could do with the crown if she had it. The peasants were in a condition of sulky defiance of Communist rule. The townspeople were growing more and more discontented, chiefly for want of food. If anyone in possession of the crown headed a counter revolution its success would be certain. And then—then Karl Gyorgy would neither be President, nor King, nor even a rich man.

Yet he clung to the hope of finding a solution of the puzzle for himself, without consulting his colleagues. He must keep the knowledge of the existence of the hexameter secret, or at worst, trust it only to people, like Count Munsky, who could easily be deceived about what it was.

He thought of Sir Almeric Cloote, the British High Commissioner. He would be very unlikely to display any curiosity about the hexameter, and yet he might possibly know the meaning of the puzzle word. He had been at Eton and Oxford. Gyorgy had that contempt for the education given in English public schools which is commonly found in those who have not received it. But he was prepared to admit that Englishmen occasionally possessed odd scraps

of knowledge of a useless kind. He laid the hexameter before Sir Almeric one day and asked him what he thought of it.

Sir Almeric, like every one else, came to a dead stop at Saligia; but, with a view to keeping up the prestige of the British Empire, he refused to admit that he was baffled. He handed the paper back to Gyorgy, saying simply that it was the worst Latin verse he had ever seen.

Pressed for a translation, he said that such stuff did not deserve to be translated.

“Writing a verse like that,” he said, “a verse full of glaring false quantities, is just as bad as issuing a dud cheque. It’s one of those things which simply aren’t done, and no one with any self-respect, certainly no one in my position, can afford to be mixed up with fellows who do them. You will understand, I’m sure, that so long as I’m British High Commissioner here I mustn’t give any kind of recognition to a man with a shady financial record, and, as I said before, a fellow who perpetrates false quantities, is pretty nearly, if not quite, as bad. Anyhow, he’s a rank outsider.”

Karl Gyorgy reflected that the education of the English gentleman is even more perverse and eccentric than he supposed. Sir Almeric congratulated himself that he had very neatly

escaped the necessity of owning that he—with all the scholarship of Eton and Balliol behind him—did not know what *Saligia* meant.

Karl Gyorgy next thought of the Archimandrite, who was still alive, a prisoner in the castle of St. Rackovitz. He had written the verse and would certainly know what it meant. But it was most unlikely that he would tell. Indeed, as Gyorgy saw plainly, the Archimandrite would show himself the worst kind of fool if he did tell. The discovery of the crown would be followed at once by the Archimandrite's execution. The priest understood that just as well as Gyorgy did, and there was no use hoping that he was fool enough to give away information that would lead to his own death. Nevertheless, Gyorgy, being nearly desperate, made up his mind to try what he could do with the Archimandrite.

He drove down to the castle of St. Rackovitz, one evening after dark, using a handsome limousine car which had once belonged to King Michael. He chose the hours of darkness for this expedition because he did not want his colleagues in the Government to know anything about it. If they found out that he was paying private visits to the Archimandrite they would inevitably start guessing what the object of the visits was. They would certainly guess wrong,

but it was very undesirable that they should guess at all.

Karl Gyorgy reached the Castle at 1 a.m. In order to be back in Csaka before daylight, he must leave it again at 2 a.m. That gave him a bare hour with the Archimandrite. He wasted no time in preliminary courtesies but walked straight into the bedroom in which the prisoner was locked up for the night.

The Archimandrite was in bed, as all good men are at that hour if they've nowhere better to go. He woke and sat up when Karl Gyorgy walked in carrying a lantern.

It is difficult to be dignified when sitting up in bed in a grey flannel nightshirt—the old gentleman had never reconciled himself to pyjamas—but the Archimandrite managed it. He buttoned the neck of the nightshirt, pulled down the sleeves, tucked the bedclothes round his legs and greeted his visitor. He greeted him with courtesy, but with a certain cool aloofness which was almost contemptuous, very much as a fine gentleman might greet an inferior who takes an unpardonable liberty. This disconcerted Karl Gyorgy, who thought himself in a position to overcrowd the Archimandrite. He began by making a mistake.

“The message that you sent to the Grand Duchess Olga,” he said, “has come into my

hands. You realize, I am sure, what that means. I am in possession of the secret of the hiding-place of the crown."

The Archimandrite smiled in a way which was exceedingly annoying. It was possible that Karl Gyorgy had somehow obtained a copy of the hexameter which was scrawled on the pectoral cross. He was certainly not in possession of the secret of the hiding-place of the crown. If he had been he would not have come to the castle of St. Rackovitz in the middle of the night to say so.

"But," said the Archimandrite gently, "I never sent any message to the Grand Duchess, except my blessing, of course, except my blessing."

He spoke with the innocent simplicity of a little child. His tone and manner would have carried conviction to anyone who did not actually know that he was lying. An ecclesiastic is the best liar in the world. Laymen, like Karl Gyorgy, never succeed in lying with the same supreme efficiency, though they practise long and hard. Even a seasoned diplomat will admit that he is an amateur compared to a bishop. The reason of this is that an ecclesiastic only lies in good causes. Laymen, especially politicians, lie for all sorts of mean and selfish reasons. "Thrice is he armed who hath his

quarrel just." Threefold is the skill of him who lies for the sake of truth and righteousness.

Karl Gyorgy did not, of course, believe the Archimandrite any more than the Archimandrite believed him. Half an hour was spent in perfectly futile repetitions of statements which carried no kind of conviction. Karl Gyorgy went on saying that he had got the secret. The Archimandrite blandly repeated that he had sent no message. The advantage rested with the Archimandrite, though he did not know it. He could afford to wait. Karl Gyorgy could not. His short time was slipping away. He was forced to shift his ground.


He asked the Archimandrite suddenly what *Saligia* meant. The Archimandrite raised his eyebrows and looked puzzled.

"*Saligia!* *Saligia!* Now where have I heard that word before?"

Karl Gyorgy, growing impatient, took to threats. The Archimandrite was not in the least impressed. He knew perfectly well that no one would dare to execute him until the crown was found.

"*Saligia*," he murmured. "I wish I could remember. But why do you ask me about that word?"

"Because," said Karl Gyorgy bluntly, "it is the key word of your hexameter."



"My hexameter! But really, Mr. Gyorgy, is it no use my assuring you that I have not written a hexameter."

"*'Si vis coronam,'*" said Karl Gyorgy, who by this time knew the verse by heart. "*'Saligia prima petenda.'*" It's no good your denying that you wrote that. I know you did."

Here the Archimandrite made a mistake. His legs were fairly warm, but the upper part of his body was chilly. He did not know that Karl Gyorgy had only an hour to spend in the Castle. He was beginning to fear that he might be kept sitting up in the cold all night. He determined to get rid of his visitor if he could.

"That hexameter which you quote," he said, "why do you suppose it refers to the crown of Dravidia?"

Karl Gyorgy felt that he was getting on at last. He ceased threatening and began to promise the Archimandrite all sorts of things—liberty, the use of his cathedral, his position as head of the Church again, a settled and sufficient income paid by the State.

"Have you looked out *Saligia* in a dictionary?" said the Archimandrite.

"I've looked it out in every dictionary in the world, and it's not to be found."

This was a relief to the Archimandrite. He had always been haunted by the fear that some

industrious scholar might have slipped Saligia into a dictionary, where it certainly had no right to be.

"And yet," he said, "I seem to have heard the word somewhere."

"If you'll tell me what it means," said Karl Gyorgy, "I'll undertake—I'll sign an agreement guaranteeing you——"

The Archimandrite waved him to silence.

"I have it," he said. "I recollect now. Saligia is the old name for the marshy district on the frontier where the English High Commissioner goes to shoot geese. I remember seeing it on a very ancient map."

He was getting colder and colder, therefore more and more anxious to get rid of Karl Gyorgy. If he had not been in a hurry he might easily have invented a more plausible explanation of Saligia. A bog might, of course, be called Saligia, especially on an old map. Most early cartographers had a fancy for Latinizing names. But Karl Gyorgy was too astute a man to believe that the crown was hidden in any such place. He thought the matter over for a moment and realized that the King and the Archimandrite could not have got to the marshes and back on the night before the revolution broke out. It was during that night, according to the testimony of the valet, that the brass-bound box

which held the crown was taken from the palace strong-room and hidden. The valet would have been aware of it if the King had left the city. Besides, the marshes were near the frontier. If the King and the Archimandrite had got there they wouldn't have been such fools as to come back again. Nor if they had succeeded in conveying the crown there, would they have buried it. They would have taken it with them and sold the emeralds or used it as the rallying point for a counter revolution.

The Archimandrite, his eyes on the other's face, saw that he had made a mistake. The ancient bog explanation of Saligia was not good enough. He also saw that Karl Gyorgy was desperately anxious to find the word. He had suffered a good deal at the hands of the Communist Government and was likely to suffer more. It occurred to him that it would be pleasant to tease Karl Gyorgy a little. The idea was so agreeable to him that he forgot all about being cold and began a fresh explanation.

"Perhaps, after all," he said with every appearance of frankness, "I had better be quite open with you. I do know what Saligia means, and I am quite prepared to tell you under certain conditions."

"Any conditions," said Karl Gyorgy eagerly. "I shall agree to whatever you propose."

The Archimandrite demanded several conditions: the re-establishment of the Church in Dravidia with all its revenues intact, the restoration to place, office and emoluments of the cathedral Chapter, his own reinstatement in his palace, his power and dignity, a public apology from the Communist Government for all the insults offered to religion.

Karl Gyorgy did not so much as boggle at any of the conditions, nor did he attempt to bargain, a remarkable proof of his eagerness to get at the secret, since bargaining in all business matters was a delight to him.

"But——" said the Archimandrite, "you'll excuse my putting a blank question to you. What guarantee have I that you will fulfil your half of the bargain?"

"You shall have it on stamped paper," said Karl Gyorgy, "the very moment I get back to Csaka. In the meantime I must ask you to accept my solemn word of honour. I'd write it all out for you now and sign it, but I really haven't time." He looked at his watch. "In fact I've only five minutes left."

"Your word," said the Archimandrite, "is as good as your bond."

This time he was not lying. Karl Gyorgy's word and bond were of precisely equal value.

He always repudiated them if he found it to his advantage to do so.

"And yet," said the Archimandrite, "I am not sure that I ought to tell you what the word means. It is the King's secret, not mine, and he bound me over by an oath not to reveal it."

"But surely—an oath—a mere point of honour ought not to stand in your way where such very serious affairs are at stake."

"I cannot break my oath," said the Archimandrite. "But I think without doing so I can put you in the way of discovering the secret for yourself. The hexameter you quoted comes from Virgil's *Æneid*."

"From what?" asked Gyorgy, taking out a pencil and a piece of paper.

"From the *Æneid*, a poem written in Latin by a man called Virgil."

"Then why," said Karl Gyorgy, astutely, "isn't Saligia in any dictionary?"

"Because," said the Archimandrite, "Virgil did not write Saligia. The King put that in. He invented it himself. But Virgil wrote the rest of the line with another word where Saligia now stands. That word gives you the secret of the hiding-place of the crown. All you have to do is to read through the poem until you come to a line beginning 'si vis coronam' and ending 'prima petenda.' The word you want,

the word which reveals the secret, is in the middle of the line as Virgil wrote it."

"Why can't you tell me what it is?" said Karl Gyorgy.

"Because," said the Archimandrite, "I solemnly swore to the King that I wouldn't. I cannot be false to my oath."

Karl Gyorgy reflected that the workings of the ecclesiastical mind are obscure. He himself would have broken any oath without hesitation. He had met men, disagreeable and troublesome men, who would neither break nor evade even their promises. The Archimandrite seemed to occupy an intermediate position between the two extremes. He would not break, but he seemed to have no objection to skirting round an oath.

"Is that poem, the *Æneid*, very long?" asked Karl Gyorgy.

"Very."

The Archimandrite had chosen the *Æneid* because it was the longest poem he knew and he wanted to keep Gyorgy occupied until—until perhaps the Grand Duchess found out the real meaning of Saligia. But the *Æneid*, though long, is not long enough. It might be read through in—— The Archimandrite did not know exactly how long it would take to read the *Æneid* through in search of a particular line.

But he felt there would be no harm in lengthening out the task.

"I'm not quite sure," he said, "that the line isn't in the Georgics. Better read them through too. You'll find them perfectly charming."

"Long?"

"Rather," said the Archimandrite. "Not very. But now I come to think the matter over, I'm not even certain that the line isn't somewhere in Ovid; there's a good deal of Ovid, the *Metamorphoses*, the *Ars Amoris*, the *Tristia*, and other poems which I don't remember at the moment. It was the King who chose the line. I never saw it myself, and although he told me I'm afraid I've forgotten exactly where it is. But you'll find it. If it isn't in Ovid try Horace—Epistles and Satires. You needn't work through the Odes. They aren't in hexameters."

"Damn it all," said Karl Gyorgy, "can't you give me better information than that?"

"I'm doing my best," said the Archimandrite. "If it isn't in Horace fall back on some of the later Latin poets. There's a man called Prudentius who might have written that line."

"It seems to me," said Gyorgy sulkily, "that I shall have to spend the rest of my life reading Latin poetry."

"You might be doing worse things," said the

Archimandrite. "I'm sure you'll enjoy yourself once you get into the swing of it. And you'll be by far the most cultured statesman in Europe when you've finished, even if you never find the line."

Karl Gyorgy became suddenly and acutely suspicious. His suspicion became a certainty, and with the certainty came anger.

His face turned a dark purple colour. His lips drew back, baring his teeth. He looked most unpleasant and ferocious.

"If you're fooling me——" he snarled.

"I am," said the Archimandrite simply. "I wonder you didn't find that out sooner."

"I'll have you shot to-morrow morning," said Karl Gyorgy.

"I don't think you dare," said the Archimandrite. "At least not until you find the crown, and in order to do that—— If I were you I'd start learning Latin at once."

CHAPTER IV

AFTER his failure with the Archimandrite Karl Gyorgy remained sulkily inactive for nearly six weeks. The thought that the

Grand Duchess was at work on the puzzle brought on occasional fits of violent passion, very unpleasant for every one near him. He might have become actually dangerous had he known that Roche also was at work on Saligia with all the best brains in Dublin to help him. And all the while, in an obscure parish in the south of Ireland there was a scholarly old clergyman who knew all about Saligia—had Karl Gyorgy guessed that he would have been a raging lunatic. But nobody could have guessed that.

In the end he was driven to ask the aid of the Greek expert about whom Count Munsky had spoken to him. He did so most unwillingly, convinced that if the man found out anything he would find out too much. But there was nothing else to do, and he supposed, if the worst came to the worst, that he could buy the Greek, or, perhaps, a simpler thing—have him shot.

The Greek's name was Kapsonidos. He was a man of singularly acute mind. When he was sent for in the middle of the night to visit Karl Gyorgy in his private rooms he guessed at once that he was to be employed in discovering some secret of the very greatest importance. Such work may be very profitable. It may also, under an employer like Karl Gyorgy, be extremely dangerous. Kapsonidos made up his

mind to go warily. He realized, just as clearly as Gyorgy did, that if the secret were a really valuable one, he must either be bought or shot. He greatly preferred being bought, and meant, if he could manage it, that the price should be high.

Karl Gyorgy began by telling him that there was a cryptogram to be read.

Kapsonidos, with the garrulous simplicity of an expert who has no thought for anything but his art, began an account of the nature of cryptograms.

“All forms of secret writing,” he said, “fall into one of three classes. The commonest device is to rearrange the alphabet according to a prearranged method, so that each letter stands for a different letter, and the document so written cannot be read without a knowledge of the system of the rearrangement. You might, for instance, reverse the order of the alphabet, using z for a, y for b, x for c, and so forth. That would be very simple, and would be read at once by any expert. Or you might take one word, such, for instance, as ‘calumniator.’ You would write it out letter by letter, and under each letter you would put another—a under c, b under a, c under l, and so forth. Then if you wished to write ‘cab’ in this code, you would write l, c, a, and——”

Like all experts, especially single-minded and innocent experts, Kapsonidos threatened to be long-winded. Karl Gyorgy, who was not in the least interested in the theory of cryptograms, cut him short.

"I don't want you to teach me how to read the things," he said. "I want you to find out the meaning of one and tell it to me."

Kapsonidos was cheerfully confident that he could read any cryptogram ever composed. All he wanted was to have the thing laid before him. But this Karl Gyorgy was unwilling to do. "*Si vis coronam*" was too plain an indication of what the verse was about.

"There's only one word that I need trouble you with," said Gyorgy; "I can read the rest of it myself."

Kapsonidos bowed his willingness to get to work on one word.

"*Saligia*," said Gyorgy.

"Perhaps you can tell me," said Kapsonidos, "what language is used in the cryptogram? That would be a great help to me in the work of solving it."

"The rest of it is Latin," said Gyorgy, "perfectly, plain, straightforward Latin which anyone can translate. But this word *Saligia* is not Latin. At least, if it is, it is not in any dictionary."

Kapsonidos walked off with Saligia written on a scrap of paper, promising to let Gyorgy know the meaning of it as soon as possible.

He had no intention of doing anything of the sort. Until Gyorgy trusted him with a little more information, he did not intend to find out the meaning of anything. But it is highly dangerous in Dravidia to defy an important member of the Government. And Kapsonidos was not such a fool as to run unnecessary risks. He shut himself up in an office, allotted to him by Gyorgy, and spent six weeks very comfortably reading French novels. In order to prove that he was really working hard, he sent out of his office every day two or three large baskets filled with papers scribbled over and torn into small pieces. Then he went to Gyorgy with his solution.

He wanted to explain at length how he arrived at it, and he had a set of intricate-looking lists of letters ready to exhibit. But Karl Gyorgy only wanted the solution. This was rather a disappointment to Kapsonidos, for he had given some time and thought to faking a highly ingenious method of working.

"I want the meaning of Saligia," said Gyorgy, "that and nothing else."

"The word for which Saligia stands," said Kapsonidos, "is cantabo."

"Cantabo? Where's cantabo?"

"Where?" said Kapsonidos. "Where? I don't think one can ask where about a word like cantabo."

"Well, then, what, if you like? What's cantabo?"

"It's the first person singular of the future tense of the verb canto," said Kapsonidos, "and means, 'I shall sing.'"

"Rot," said Gyorgy. "It can't possibly mean that."

"It does," said Kapsonidos. "Anyone with the smallest knowledge of Latin will tell you that."

"What I mean is that that can't be the right solution of Saligia."

"It's the only word," said Kapsonidos, "which satisfies the conditions of the problem, on the assumption that Saligia is Latin. Of course if it isn't Latin——"

"You'll have to try again," said Gyorgy. "Work it out this time on the assumption that Saligia is a Dravidian word."

Kapsonidos spent another six weeks of complete leisure, and then presented Gyorgy with a Dravidian word which means "buttercup." Gyorgy lost his temper and cursed the Greek. Kapsonidos was apologetic, and offered to try again on the assumption that the word was Russian.

"I know forty-eight languages," he said, "and I am quite ready to work through them all, if you wish; but of course that will take some time."

Gyorgy did a sum rapidly in his head, and came to the conclusion that Kapsonidos might be at work on the thing for six years.

"There are also," said Kapsonidos, "at least a hundred and fifty languages that I don't know. But I have no objection to learning them one by one. That, as you will easily understand, will take a good deal of time."

Karl Gyorgy saw perfectly plainly what Kapsonidos was aiming at. The man wanted to get the whole cryptogram so that when he discovered the real meaning of Saligia he would be able to guess at the valuable secret. He was not going to trust Kapsonidos. About that his mind was absolutely made up.

"Shall I try Russian next?" asked Kapsonidos blandly.

"Damn," said Gyorgy.

He had been through a period of great nerve strain, and a little outbreak of language was quite pardonable.

"Or Greek?" said Kapsonidos, still perfectly suave.

Gyorgy said "Damn" again.

"I'm afraid," said Kapsonidos, "that I shall

require some more paper. You sent me a good supply to start with, but——”

“You’ll get no more paper,” said Gyorgy. “You can go back to Count Munsky’s office and do your usual work. I don’t want you any more.”

“Ah,” said Kapsonidos. “You have given up the idea of finding the solution of your cryptogram. I dare say you are right. It would have been a very long business unless I could discover in what language it was composed, and in order to satisfy myself on that point, I should have to see——”

“The whole thing,” said Gyorgy. “Well, you won’t.”

“Otherwise,” said Kapsonidos, “it’s rather a case of expecting me to make bricks without supplying the straw, and that as you know——”

He stopped abruptly, realizing that he was alluding to an unpleasant incident in the past history of the race to which Gyorgy belonged. It is an odd fact that the Jews alone among civilized peoples dislike being reminded of their nationality. Kapsonidos, fearful of having given offence, said good-bye, and went meekly back to Count Munsky’s office, where he was employed in the department which deals specially with public morals.

Karl Gyorgy, haggard and exhausted, on the

verge of complete nervous breakdown, raged miserably over this latest failure. He made up his mind once or twice every day to trust Kapsonidos, trying to secure his fidelity by threats or bribes. Once or twice every day he made up his mind that to trust Kapsonidos would be an act of extreme folly. No bribe would be large enough to prevent his asking for more afterwards. Threats would merely result in his leaving the solution of the cryptogram written out in some secure place to be opened in the event of his death. Gyorgy, being himself an acute man, could forecast very accurately how an acute man was likely to act.

Kapsonidos went back to his old work on public morals, and he also was disappointed. He had thought a good deal about Saligia, and was forced to admit that he could not form any guess about what it meant. He had great confidence in his own powers, and still felt sure that he could read the cryptogram if he had it. But a single word is too little to work on. He hoped that by producing a series of totally worthless meanings of Saligia he might at last exhaust Gyorgy's patience and be trusted with the whole document. He had exhausted Gyorgy's patience far sooner than he expected. But he had not got what he wanted. He consoled himself with the thought that most things

come to the man who waits, and made himself as comfortable as he could in his old office.

There is, as a rule, very little work to be done in the State Department which looks after Public Morals. The reason of this is that there are no public morals in Dravidia, and no one wants to introduce such things. Kapsonidos hoped to be able to go on reading French novels just as he had in his own little office when supposed to be working at Saligia.

Thanks to the efforts of the French Government to spread their culture and spirit in Eastern Europe there was an abundant supply of French books of all kinds in Csaka, sold under cost price, and even given away if no one would buy them. But Kapsonidos, very much to his surprise, found that he could not browse at his will in the lush meadows thus provided for him. He was given some work to do.

Count Munsky cashed the order for four milliards which Gyorgy gave him. He paid the most pressing of his debts, and he intended to pay some more. But the head of the local guild of house decorators—a very powerful trade union—discovered that some money had been granted by the State for altering the cathedral. He saw at once that he and his men ought to have the money, or the greater part of it. He went, at the head of an influential

deputation, to Count Munsky, and demanded what he called "the inalienable rights of the toiling masses." Count Munsky, who was most anxious to avoid trouble, offered the house decorators half a milliard dekkas if they would put up a screen, suitable for the exhibition of moving pictures, on the west wall of the cathedral. He appointed Kapsonidos as overseer on behalf of the State, to see that this work was properly done.

The house decorators took possession of the cathedral. They filled the nave with all sorts of things, long deal tables, pots of glue, ladders, rolls of wallpaper, strips of carpet, scaffolding poles, and, of course, quantities of mud. They smoked enormous numbers of cigarettes, and sat about all day long eating out of flat tins which their wives and children brought them. Kapsonidos looked in on them two or three times a day, and came to the conclusion that the easiest life is that of a working man in a thoroughly democratic state, for those who cannot secure positions as Government servants.

Being a man of active mind, he began after awhile to be interested in the cathedral itself. There were certain frescoes in the chancel which attracted him. He tried to make out the meaning of the carving on the pulpit. He studied the figures of by-gone kings and heroes which lay

with folded hands on huge stone coffins. He came at last to the west wall. Along it, over the great door, was a series of pictures in mosaic, which at first puzzled him a great deal. They represented animals of a most undesirable kind. There was a pig, fat and bloated, a wolf which certainly deserved to be called ravening, a satyr with hairy legs and a leering face, and at one end of the row a creature that looked like an enormous slug. Kapsonidos wondered why such creatures should adorn the walls of the church. They had no sort of connection with the angels and saints of the chancel frescoes. There was nothing like them among the hundreds of little figures carved on the pulpit. Even the gargoyles outside, some of them grotesque enough, were respectable and pious compared to these vile animals on the west wall.

Kapsonidos, filled with curiosity, borrowed a ladder from one of the house decorators and set it up against the west wall. He began with the slug. It was a white slug, and therefore even more revolting than a black one would have been. Its name was written underneath it twice, once in Greek and once in Latin. Kapsonidos was of course more familiar with Greek than Latin, and it was the Greek name he read. He moved his ladder along the row, and read the Greek names of all the animals.

He understood that he had come on a series of symbolic representations of the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Avarice, Luxury, Anger, and so forth, with Accidie, the slug at which Kapsonidos had begun, at the north end of the row.

The house decorators, having spent about a month in filling the cathedral with debris, at last got to work, and very slowly erected scaffolding poles near the west wall. They tied planks to their poles and made a narrow platform. They hoped in time to set up a wooden frame on which a screen might be stretched for the cinema pictures.

Kapsonidos watched them, and it occurred to him that it would be interesting to get a series of pictures of the deadly sins. The house decorators' platform afforded a convenient stand for his camera. The light was bad in the cathedral, so he took a flash lamp with him and made a number of exposures. He secured excellent negatives, and when he had made some prints he discovered that every detail was visible. Even the Greek and Latin names at the foot of the pictures could be read plainly with the help of a magnifying glass.

It was then he made his thrilling discovery.

He had the photographs spread out before him in order, and was studying the satyr with the hairy legs. For the first time he read the

beast's Latin name—*Luxuria*. He passed on to the wolf which came next, a savage beast very properly representing anger—*Ira* was the Latin word. Then came the pig, emblem of gluttony—*Gula*. *Luxuria, Ira, Gula*. The capital initial letters formed themselves in a row before Kapsonidos. L I G. He suddenly recollected the word he had written thousands of times in order to convince Karl Gyorgy that he was working at the cryptogram. With fingers which trembled with excitement he passed the magnifying glass along the row of pictures. There were the Latin names, each with its large capital letter: *Superbia, Avaritia, Luxuria, Ira, Gula, Invidia, Accedia*—Saligia.

Like another Levantine Greek, who was also occupied about a crown, Kapsonidos uttered a joyful cry in his own language, "Eureka."

Thanks to a series of almost incredible chances, he had lighted on the meaning of the word. His first thought was that he knew Karl Gyorgy's carefully guarded secret, and could use it for his own advantage in any way he chose.

A few minutes' thought showed him that he was in reality little better off than he had been before he lighted on his discovery. Saligia meant the Seven Deadly Sins, but what profit could possibly be got out of that knowledge? Karl Gyorgy was no doubt perfectly willing to

practise the whole of them, especially avarice, lust and gluttony, but he would do so—had done so for years—without requiring advice from a cryptogram. There is a great deal of pleasure to be got out of sins of any kind, and doubtless an intenser kind of pleasure out of sins labelled “deadly” by theological experts. But Kapsonidos did not believe that Karl Gyorgy simply wanted pleasure. He wanted money and he wanted power. It did not seem clear how either could be got out of the Seven Deadly Sins, whether you practised or eschewed them.

CHAPTER V

KAPSONIDOS locked up his photographs and sat down to consider his position.

He had the meaning of the key word, the really important word of Karl Gyorgy’s cryptogram. Without a knowledge of the meaning of Saligia, the rest of the writing was useless. That seemed perfectly plain. On the other hand his chance-gained knowledge of the meaning of Saligia was also worthless unless he could get access to the rest of the writing. No matter how hard he thought he could hit on

no way of turning the Seven Deadly Sins to his advantage.

It seemed a plain case for bargaining. Karl Gyorgy held one-half of the secret, totally useless by itself. Kapsonidos held the other half, and it too, by itself, was useless. The obvious thing to do was to approach Karl Gyorgy, make some kind of agreement with him and then divide the spoil, whatever the spoil might be.

But Kapsonidos was a very cautious man. He knew that it would be difficult to make a satisfactory bargain with Karl Gyorgy, who had all the genius of his race for wriggling out of an agreement which seemed perfectly sound and strong. He did not forget either that it is very dangerous to go bargaining with a man who can, at the last resort, appeal to a firing party to decide a point in dispute.

In respect of the firing party, Karl Gyorgy was certainly in the stronger position. On the other hand, Kapsonidos felt that he might safely discount the possibility of anyone else discovering the connection between Saligia and the figures on the west wall of the cathedral. A series of accidents, such as that which had enlightened him, does not happen twice. He and he only possessed the information which Karl Gyorgy badly wanted.

He began by making as sure as he could that

nobody else should surprise his secret. He took out the negatives of his photographs and carefully scraped off the parts of the film on which the names, Greek and Latin, were recorded. He burned the only prints he had made.

Then he went out, at about midnight, to call on Karl Gyorgy.

He found Gyorgy seated at his piano playing one of Chopin's Nocturnes with real taste and feeling. Like most Eastern European Jews the man was a musician, thoroughly appreciative of the best violinists and pianists, devoted to grand opera, and able himself to give good rendering of his favourite composers. Music must surely be the lowest of the arts. It is the only one in which men of no education can excel, men like the Hungarian gipsies who are more musical than anyone else in the world, but are certainly the most ignorant and least civilized people in Europe.

Karl Gyorgy finished the Nocturne, lingering with sensuous delight on the final chords before he turned from the piano. Kapsonidos waited patiently. When silence at last gave him the chance of speaking, he began his negotiations with a directness which is often the subtlest kind of diplomacy, which was disconcerting to Karl Gyorgy who always favoured oblique

methods of approaching important subjects.

"I have found the meaning of Saligia," he said.

Not even Chopin's Nocturne had wholly soothed Karl Gyorgy's nerves. Indeed, the sedative effects of music are probably exaggerated, even in the case of Jews. Saul appears to have been calmed by David's harp, but the moment the playing ceased he took to throwing javelins about. Gyorgy did not actually hurl the music stool at Kapsonidos. What he did was to jump up and pant out :

"Tell me. Tell me at once."

If his nerves had not been all wrong he would not have displayed this extreme eagerness at the beginning of what would almost certainly turn out to be a business deal with Kapsonidos. "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer, but when he goeth on his way then he praiseth it." That is the wisdom of King Solomon, and no man ever appreciated the value of it more than Karl Gyorgy. Yet here, at a most critical and important moment, he had reversed the practice of the wisest of his race. It was almost as if he had said : "I want it, I want it, and you may name your own price."

Kapsonidos, who had been through no special nerve strain, and was therefore quite master of himself, appreciated his position at once. He

had intended to ask a large price for the information he had to sell. He at once determined to ask a much larger one. He hesitated for a minute, trying to make up his mind how large the new price should be. The pause gave Karl Gyorgy the chance of regaining command of himself. He saw the mistake he had made, and tried to minimize it.

"If you've come to me with any more 'cantabos' and 'buttercups,'" he said, "you may go away again. I've had as much as I'm going to stand of that kind of thing."

Kapsonidos lit a cigarette, and sat down uninvited.

"I dare say," he said, "that 'cantabo' must have been a bit annoying when you'd waited a month for it, and 'Buttercup' might have put anyone in a bad temper. But this time I've got the real solution. I'm so sure of it that I'm going to ask a thumping big price. You'll remember that I never attempted to make a bargain about 'Buttercup.' I knew it wasn't worth paying for. But this time I want £20,000."

The mention of such a sum restored Gyorgy to his normal self. He met the demand with a scornful laugh. Kapsonidos repeated it. A long wrangle followed. Gyorgy began by offering to pay a reasonable price in Dravidian dek-

kas. Kapsonidos stuck to his pounds sterling. Gyorgy raised his bids, always in dekkas, until the sums became so stupendous that Kapsonidos gave up all attempt to visualize the rows of noughts behind the index figure. He lit a fresh cigarette, and repeated his demand for pounds sterling.

Gyorgy began again with an offer of one thousand pounds. He bid up by hundreds at a time, disputing over each rise, and constantly declaring that he had reached the final possible figure. It is likely that Kapsonidos would have given in and accepted fifteen thousand pounds when Gyorgy offered it with tears of real emotion in his eyes. But the memory of Gyorgy's first unfortunate outburst stiffened the will of the Levantine.

"I'll meet you this far," he said. "If you really can't pay the whole twenty thousand pounds in sterling I'll take the balance either in American dollars or Swiss francs."

This was no real concession. Gyorgy had money in New York and money in Berne ; but he was just as unwilling to part with either as to write a cheque on his London bank. In the end, with a sob which would have moved most people to pity, he gave in. For the first time in his life he had been beaten in bargaining. Kapsonidos pressed his advantage.

"Give me a cheque on London at once," he said.

Gyorgy crept feebly to his writing table, unlocked a drawer, and drew out an English cheque-book.

"And——" Kapsonidos held up a warning finger. "And," he repeated emphatically when Gyorgy looked round.

"And a diplomatic passport, naming me as Minister Plenipotentiary of the Dravidian State, duly accredited to the Court of England. I'm not taking any risks of being stopped at the frontier and having your cheque taken from me."

"You shall have it," said Gyorgy.

Then he filled up the cheque.

"I may mention," said Kapsonidos, "just to avoid all mistakes, that the information I possess is in a sealed envelope in safe hands to be opened a week from to-day unless I give orders to the contrary. That allows me time to get to London and cash the cheque."

This was pure bluff ; but it impressed Gyorgy, who was already cowed. He made just one more effort to assert himself.

"I shall hand you the cheque," he said, "when you tell me the meaning of Saligia, not before."

"Certainly," said Kapsonidos. "I don't ask

you to buy a pig in a poke. Saligia has no real meaning in itself. It's an artificial word made up of the initials of the Latin names of the Seven Deadly Sins."

Gyorgy banged his fist down on the table.

"You're simply playing off another of your vile tricks on me," he said. "This is worse than buttercup or cantabo. It means nothing, nothing at all."

He tore up the cheque he had written into fragments, and flung them broadcast on the floor.

Kapsonidos was convinced that the Seven Deadly Sins meant nothing whatever to Gyorgy. He was equally convinced that he had found out the true meaning of Saligia. He saw at once that he had still something to sell. Gyorgy evidently did not know that there were pictures of the Seven Deadly Sins on the west wall of the cathedral. That was the piece of information required to make the solution of Saligia really valuable. With this in his mind, and in hopes of securing another twenty thousand pounds, he set to work to convince Gyorgy that Saligia did stand for the seven sins, and could stand for nothing else.

He worked patiently, writing out the list of the sins—*Superbia*, *Avaritia*, *Luxuria*, and all the rest of them, arguing that the connection

could not be a mere accident. He went beyond anything he actually knew in asserting that the Christian Church always put the sins in the exact order which made their initial letters spell Saligia. He said—this was a mere guess, but not very far from the truth—that the word Saligia was commonly used in the medieval church as a mnemonic, so that no one would have any excuse for forgetting what the deadly sins were.

He talked persuasively for nearly an hour, arguing his case with an eloquence only possible to a man who believes he is right. In the end Karl Gyorgy was half-convinced.

“But,” he said, “it makes no sense, simply no sense at all.”

“About that,” said Kapsonidos, “I cannot give you an opinion. I haven’t seen the rest of the cryptogram.”

“I won’t show you that,” said Gyorgy.

Kapsonidos was eager to see the whole cryptogram, as eager as he had ever been in his life about anything. He was convinced that it contained information of immense value. But he managed to maintain an appearance of complete indifference.

“Very well,” he said, “good night. You ought, of course, to pay over the sum agreed on for my information. But since it turns out

to be valueless to you, I make no demand for the twenty thousand pounds. Good night again."

Karl Gyorgy allowed him to get as far as the door, saw him open it, saw him slowly pass through it before he called him back. Kapsonidos came in again, shut the door behind him, sat down and waited.

Gyorgy, with fingers that trembled and with sweat running down his face, took a copy of the Archimandrite's hexameter from his desk and handed it to Kapsonidos:

"Si vis coronam saligia prima petenda."

"That seems to me," said Kapsonidos, "perfectly plain. 'If you wish for the crown——' I presume the crown of Dravidia is meant——?"

Gyorgy nodded.

"'You must look for it among the Seven Deadly Sins.'"

"But it's absurd," said Gyorgy. "That's what I complain of. The thing makes no sense. How can the crown be hidden——? I know it is hidden. I dare say you know it too."

"I didn't know that," said Kapsonidos. "Who hid it?"

"The King and the Archimandrite."

That removed any faint doubt of the correctness of his solution from Kapsonidos' mind. The Archimandrite, of course, knew his own

cathedral thoroughly, and was familiar with the pictures of the sins on the west wall. He would be familiar too with their Latin names, and no doubt *Saligia* was a word that he knew.

"How can a crown be hidden among sins?" said Gyorgy. "It's nonsense, sheer nonsense. It doesn't mean anything."

"I think I can tell you exactly what it means," said Kapsonidos. "But first I should like you to write that cheque again."

Gyorgy did not hesitate. He drew the cheque-book from its drawer.

"But this time for forty thousand pounds, if you please," said Kapsonidos.

Gyorgy was beaten and he knew it; but he had not so utterly lost all sense of self-respect and dignity as to write a cheque for such a sum without a struggle. The bargaining began again and went on very much as it had before, except that this time there was no mention of Dravidian dekkas, and Gyorgy's first bid was twenty-one thousand pounds.

Kapsonidos was a Christian, not a Jew, and it may be reckoned to him for righteousness that he remembered even in the moment of his triumph that mercy is a virtue enjoined in the Gospels. He spared Gyorgy, agreeing to accept thirty-nine thousand pounds, although he might have held out successfully for the whole

forty thousand. This shows that it is easier for a man in a difficulty to do business with a Gentile, even a Levantine Greek, than with a Jew. A Shylock would have exacted the last thousand pounds. Portia, probably, would have acted as Kapsonidos did, especially if she was exhausted by a wrangle which had lasted from midnight till 3 a.m.

"On the west wall of the cathedral," said Kapsonidos, "there are large pictures of the Seven Deadly Sins. The pictures themselves are done in mosaic, and one can see that they have not been interfered with. What the Archimandrite and the King must have done is this. They took out a stone or two either above or below one of the pictures, scooped a hole in the rubble inside the wall, laid the box containing the crown there, and then put the stones back in their place."

"I'll have the whole wall pulled down tomorrow," said Gyorgy.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," said Kapsonidos. "If you do, somebody else will find the box, and the discovery will be public property in an hour. You don't want that, I suppose."

"No, I don't."

"Then you'd better do the thing yourself," said Kapsonidos. "I'm sorry I can't help you,

but I want to run off to London to-morrow with this cheque. By the way, don't forget the passport."

"If you'll stay and help me," said Gyorgy, "I'll let you have the extra thousand I knocked off your cheque."

"Thanks, no," said Kapsonidos. "But you really don't want any help. All you have to do is to search about for the stones which the Archimandrite and the King removed. They are bound to have left some traces of their work, however carefully they put the stones back. I haven't examined the wall from that point of view, but I should say it would be quite easy to spot the fresh mortar. Even if they've left no marks behind them, the most you will have to do is to remove a stone or two above and below each of the pictures till you come on the crown. That won't take you very long. I should say a fortnight at the outside, even if you come on the right one last of all. You'll have to work at night, of course, if you don't want to attract attention to what you're doing. But luckily the scaffolding is there, so you won't have any difficulty in getting at the pictures."

The prospect of a fortnight's work as a stone mason was not attractive to Karl Gyorgy.

"I suppose," he said, "that there's nothing

in that Latin verse to give us a hint which picture they chose? "

"Nothing," said Kapsonidos.

There was nothing in the hexameter as Karl Gyorgy received it from his brother, nothing in it as Roche wrote it down for Otto Kuhn. But if Roche had been a little more careful, he would not have omitted the circumflex accent which the Archimandrite had put over the final "a" in Saligia. That, if he had seen it, would have given Kapsonidos all the information he required.

CHAPTER VI

THE Archimandrite and the King had covered their traces very well. Realizing that they could not possibly replace the stones they removed without leaving some signs of their work, they went through the whole seven pictures loosening the mortar between the stones above and below every single one of them; and then smoothing over all the joints with fresh mortar. The result gave the impression that the whole wall immediately over and under the pictures had been re-pointed. There

was nothing to show which stones had been tampered with. Gyorgy was forced to face the task of working over the whole seven pictures.

Like all Jews he detested manual work. He was not physically strong. His hands were soft. He had no skill in using tools. Kapsonidos' estimate of the time it would take him to investigate the seven pictures was far too low. Gyorgy spent three nights at the stones above *Superbia*, returning each morning to his room with bruised hands and exhausted muscles. The two stones below *Superbia* took four days, because his hands were so sore that he could only work very slowly. A man of less determination would have given up the job when, after a fortnight's work, he reached *Luxuria*. But the prize was an immense one. And Gyorgy would not have risen to the eminence he had reached if he had not been a very determined man.

He worked away and had got through *Ira*, more than half his task, when another letter reached him from Budapest, a letter written to him by his brother, Otto Kuhn, and forwarded by the same sallow-faced young man.

It contained news of the most alarming kind. The Grand Duchess Olga, after remaining perfectly quiet for months, had suddenly become frenziedly energetic. She rushed about Buda-

pest all day in a taxi, visiting most unusual parts of the city. At night she received in her room in the Ritz visitors who were closeted with her for hours at a time. These men looked like artisans and labourers. They were ill-clad, often lean with under-feeding, and might very well have been discontented members of an oppressed proletariat. But Otto Kuhn knew that they were nothing of the sort. He recognized many of them and gave their names to his brother. They were members of the exiled aristocracy of Dravidia, men who had been forced to earn their living in Budapest as factory hands, navvies, carpenters, coal-heavers, doing any kind of work by which a pittance could be earned. Such men are highly dangerous to an infant state when they are organized and led.

Otto Kuhn's information went farther. The Grand Duchess had been in close communication with the leaders of the Awakening Hungary party in Budapest. He did not explain to his brother what the Awakening Hungarians are. That was unnecessary. Karl Gyorgy knew all about them. They are young men vowed to the restoration of the ancient boundaries of Hungary, but quite ready to undertake any other job of a sporting kind, such as thrashing Jews with heavy sticks, attacking Czecho-Slovakians

on the frontier or killing such Rumanians as deserve death, that is to say, all Rumanians.

Otto Kuhn had not been able to find out exactly what agreement the Grand Duchess had made with the Awakening Hungarians, but the fact that she was engaged in negotiations with them was suggestive and ominous.

The Grand Duchess had also—here Otto Kuhn's knowledge of banking affairs made him sure of what he said—received large sums of money derived from the sale of foreign securities. The Grand Duchess, though she lived quietly in the Ritz, was a very wealthy woman, and her fortune had escaped the grasp of the Dravidian Government because it was all safely invested in England or in America. She had turned a great deal of it into cash, which stood to her credit in various banks in Budapest. She certainly did not spend the money on herself. What was she using it for?

Karl Gyorgy was perfectly capable of drawing his own inference from the facts which his brother told him. But Otto Kuhn set down his opinion in black and white:

The Grand Duchess was contemplating an armed invasion of Dravidia, the sort of expedition which in Eastern Europe is called a "Putsch." In the face of the Red Army of the Republic with its French training, such an

enterprise would be hopeless unless the Grand Duchess had secured, or knew how to secure, possession of the crown. Without that her army of dispossessed gentlemen and hired Awakening Hungarians would be far too weak to affect anything. With the crown in her possession she could rely on the peasants rallying to her side, and might even reckon that the Red Army would be very half-hearted in fighting. There lay the real danger. Had the Grand Duchess succeeded in solving the Saligia riddle and found the crown? About that Otto Kuhn could offer no opinion.

Karl Gyorgy, after reading his brother's letter, thought it likely that the Grand Duchess had found out what Saligia meant, but he felt certain that she had not yet laid her hands on the crown. *Gula*, *Invidia* and *Accedia* were still untouched on the west wall of the cathedral. Above or below one of them was the hiding-place of the precious crown; and before she could get it the Grand Duchess must reach the cathedral. To Gyorgy's acute mind her plans seemed obvious. With a small, mobile, well-armed force, she would attempt a surprise raid in the hope of reaching Csaka before any serious opposition was offered. There, of course, the fate of her party was certain. Cut off from its base, surrounded by the Red Army of the

Republic, it would speedily be forced to surrender unless—Gyorgy saw clearly that on this point all depended—unless the Grand Duchess found the crown.

Gyorgy was a shaken man. The long nerve strain, the humiliation of his defeat by Kaponidos, the nights of severe physical toil, had left him a wreck. But he was not so utterly prostrate as to be incapable of thought and action. He saw at once what he should do. The frontier must be held. If the Grand Duchess's force could be immobilized there it would melt away and disappear. Only in the event of her reaching the capital and entering the cathedral would she become really dangerous.

He acted promptly. He sent an urgent summons to his colleagues in the Government, and within an hour of the receipt of his brother's letter he had laid the situation before them. He did not tell them all he knew. He made no mention of the crown or of the Seven Deadly Sins, but he told them enough to make them feel that the position of the Republic, though not desperate, was serious.

The Frenchman who had trained the Red Army was sent for and consulted, as military adviser to the Government. He spoke in the most reassuring way. The Republican Army

could be on the march in twenty-four hours. It was far stronger, better disciplined and better armed than any force which the Grand Duchess could possibly put into the field. He had no doubt whatever about the result of a battle if a battle were fought. He agreed with Gyorgy that the frontier ought to be defended.

Maps were sent for. It became clear that there were only three danger spots on the frontier. For the rest the nature of the country rendered invasion impossible. No considerable force could cross the trackless, thickly forested mountains to the north. Nor was it possible to march even a small army through the belt of swamp where the British High Commissioner shot geese. There remained a narrow valley leading through the mountains, which could easily be held by a small force, an uncertain road which skirted the south end of the marshes, and—the real danger point—the flat ground between the mountains and the marshes traversed by a good road and by the railway.

“Here,” said Gyorgy, laying his finger on the railway line, “here we should concentrate our forces for the defence of the country.”

That was a perfectly simple plan and, unless their French adviser had misled them, sure of success. The frontier there could certainly be held until the Grand Duchess's army got tired

of trying to force it. But there were members of the Council, vindictive because a little frightened, who wanted to do more than hold the frontier. It was proposed that the Grand Duchess's army should be allowed to cross the frontier and to march several miles towards Csaka. Then it could be surrounded, cut off and compelled to surrender. Thus a sharp lesson would be taught to all counter revolutionaries, and the republic safeguarded against any future invasion.

The Frenchman, poring over the map, agreed that this was possible. He even pointed out the exact place where the Grand Duchess's army should be stopped, and explained how the Red Army might converge on the flanks and approach the rear of the invaders.

"But afterwards," said Count Munsky, "when they have surrendered, what shall we do with them?"

"Shoot them," said various members of the Council, "especially——"

The names they called the Grand Duchess were many, and all of them were objectionable. It was perfectly plain that whoever else might be allowed to escape she must certainly be executed.

Then Karl Gyorgy remembered the British High Commissioner.

“ But what about Sir Almeric Cloote ? ” he said. “ He’s sure to interfere if——”

There was a babble of assurances that Sir Almeric Cloote could not, and would not, interfere.

“ What business is it of his ? ”

“ What excuse has he for interfering ? ”

“ What can he do ? ”

“ The man,” said Gyorgy, “ is certainly a fool.”

With shouts of approbation everybody agreed that Sir Almeric was a fool.

“ But just because he is a fool,” said Gyorgy, “ we cannot calculate on what he will do.”

“ He can’t object to our defending our own frontier,” said Count Munsky.

“ He will send telegrams to his Government,” said Gyorgy.

“ Pooh ! ” said the French military adviser.

Everybody else except Gyorgy said “ Pooh ! ” some in Dravidian, some in German. Count Munsky, the best educated of them, said it in French and then in English.

“ And,” he repeated, “ he cannot interfere with our defending our own frontier.”

“ He will interfere with our shooting the Grand Duchess,” said Gyorgy.

That, as everybody saw at once, was exactly the sort of thing which the British High Com-

missioner would interfere with. If he made himself objectionable, as he had, about the shooting of a few peasants, he was likely to become exceedingly offensive over the execution of the Grand Duchess.

“And then,” said Gyorgy, “what happens to our loan?”

The French military adviser drummed his fingers impatiently on the table. He hated this way of mixing up politics and finance with the simple operations of war. The other members of the Council sat perplexed. Every one of them knew, though none so well as Gyorgy, that the financial security of Dravidia depended on obtaining a loan, and that a loan could only be looked for from England. There was no use expecting France to lend money, for plainly France had none to lend. If for any reason—the shooting of a Grand Duchess, for instance—the British High Commissioner opposed the loan, Dravidia would be very near a collapse, and—a tremendously important matter—no official salaries could be paid.

“Perhaps,” said Count Munsky, “we had better not shoot the Grand Duchess.”

But Gyorgy did not agree with him there. He had his own reasons for insisting on getting rid of the Grand Duchess. He had no doubt that she knew where the crown was hidden, and,

even if she was prevented getting it herself, she might tell some one else where it was.

"It is a great pity," said Count Munsky, "that the British High Commissioner is not off shooting geese at this moment."

He spoke plaintively and rather hopelessly, and a mournful coo of agreement went round the Council table. If only Sir Almeric had been away on one of his sporting expeditions, the invading force might have been captured and the Grand Duchess shot before he knew anything about what was happening or had time to make a protest. Unfortunately, Sir Almeric was in Csaka.

Count Munsky's feeble wish suggested a plan to Gyorgy.

"If you will leave the Englishman to me," he said, "I may be able to manage him."

Every one agreed that if the management of Sir Almeric was at all possible, Karl Gyorgy was the man to manage him. There was no formal vote taken on the subject, but a murmur of consent showed Gyorgy that his colleagues were unanimous in wishing to trust him with the negotiations.

"But I must have a clear twenty-four hours, and during that time, there must not be so much as a whisper about the possibility of an invasion."

"Thank God," said Count Munskey, "we have a firm grip on the newspapers. They daren't print anything unless we let them."

"It's not merely a question of printing things," said Gyorgy. "People mustn't know anything. If they know they talk, and the Englishman will hear something. If his suspicions are aroused I may not be able to manage him. Therefore——"

Karl Gyorgy paused and nodded significantly. The other members of the Council also nodded significantly. They meant that anyone who showed signs of knowing anything about the threatened invasion would be dealt with in a very drastic manner.

"And of course," said Gyorgy, looking at the French military adviser, "no steps must be taken in the way of mobilization before this time to-morrow."

The French military adviser, a man of great skill in the operations of war, protested hotly, pointing out the extreme perils of delay. The Council wavered, every member of it except Karl Gyorgy. He admitted that delays are dangerous, but said that British High Commissioners are more dangerous still, and Sir Almeric was the very most dangerous kind of Englishman. In such affairs as the shooting of a Grand Duchess he would not be moved

by any consideration of politics or influenced by any reasoning. He must be got out of Csaka or else it would be impossible to shoot the Grand Duchess. And from Gyorgy's point of view the shooting of the Grand Duchess was an absolute necessity. After a stiff wrangle with the French military adviser, Gyorgy got his way, and was given a clear twenty-four hours to do the best he could with Sir Almeric. The Council broke up at 6 a.m.

CHAPTER VII

AT 10 a.m. Karl Gyorgy called on the British High Commissioner.

Sir Almeric was lodged in a rambling old palace which had once been the property of the Grand Duchess Olga. When his visitor arrived he was seated at his desk in a room which had been the boudoir of many Grand Duchesses. Since Sir Almeric took possession of it this room had been redecorated and refurnished. The French Empire chairs and tables, heavily gilt affairs, had been removed, and deep English chairs and sofas imported. The Bartolozzi prints had been taken down from the walls,

and stags' heads, opulent in horns, hung instead of them. A fine tiger skin, the trophy of an Indian shooting expedition, was stretched on the floor. A stuffed black bear, once an inhabitant of the Rocky Mountains, stood like a guardian at the door. That bear was so realistically stuffed and set up that Karl Gyorgy always gave an involuntary start at the sight of it. He hated wild beasts, even when he had good reason to suppose they were dead.

"I have come," said Gyorgy, "to ask your advice about a rather troublesome little matter."

That, he felt, was a good way of opening the conversation. Everybody in the world likes being asked for advice, for everybody likes to feel that his advice is worth having. The less intelligent a man is—the less, that is to say, his advice is worth—the more he likes being asked for it. Gyorgy was of opinion that Sir Almeric was almost entirely devoid of intelligence. It followed that he would be immensely flattered by being asked for advice.

Sir Almeric waited cautiously. He expected to be asked to do something about the Dravidian loan, and had no intention of committing himself in any way. He was agreeably surprised when Gyorgy went on:

"I am not myself what is called a sportsman, but I understand that you are."

Every Englishman—Gyorgy knew this—likes to be called a sportsman, and if you want to flatter him that is the best way of doing it.

"I have shot a bit in various parts of the world," said Sir Almeric.

He looked round with pardonable pride at the stags' heads on the walls. His eyes dwelt for a moment on the tiger skin, and rested finally on the stuffed bear.

"A report has reached me," said Gyorgy, "from the village of Warwitz. You know perhaps where Warwitz is?"

Sir Almeric did not. Gyorgy, who had spent an hour over a large scale map, explained the situation of the place. It was a remote hamlet, perched high among the mountains, inaccessible to wheeled vehicles, at least twenty-four hours' journey from Csaka.

"The inhabitants," said Gyorgy, "complain that they are suffering from the depredations of bears."

"Bears!"

"Large, ferocious, black bears," said Gyorgy, his eyes fixed on the stuffed specimen from the Rocky Mountains.

Now the Dravidian bear is small and brown. Moreover, he is a quiet beast, who does no harm. No one who knows him would ever describe him as ferocious.

Sir Almeric knew all about Dravidian bears. He received Gyorgy's statement about the suffering of the inhabitants of Warwitz with extreme surprise ; but he kept his feelings to himself and managed to look mildly interested.

"The bears," said Gyorgy, "carry off sheep and cattle. They even seize children, and cases are reported of their attacking men."

Once, during a railway journey, he had read a story about a tiger which behaved in that way to the inhabitants of an Indian village. An heroic Englishman went forth and slew the tiger. It was intimated in the story that all Englishmen behaved in that way when they could, being possessed by a sporting spirit which made them want to shoot tigers, and being the kind of chivalrous fools who enjoy succouring distressed villagers who are no relation to them.

He calculated that Sir Almeric would feel about the Warwitz bears very much as the Englishman in the story felt about the tigers. He would want to go out and shoot them. It was a well-meant effort, but unfortunately he only succeeded in making Sir Almeric suspicious. The Dravidian bear does not eat cattle or sheep and Sir Almeric knew it.

"The villagers," said Sir Almeric mildly,

"ought to throw stones at that bear and chase it away."

This time it was Gyorgy who was surprised. He himself would as soon have attacked a lion with a pea-shooter as thrown a stone at a bear. He could not understand how Sir Almeric came to make such a flippant suggestion. He felt that he must have failed to emphasize sufficiently the extreme peril of the villagers.

"They are too terrified to do anything," he said. "The bears come in packs, hundreds of them together, howling."

This time he was thinking of wolves. There are stories told in Dravidia of hunger-maddened wolves who hunt in packs and howl.

"I should rather like to see those Warwitz bears," said Sir Almeric.

Gyorgy was greatly pleased. His simple little plan was working out precisely as he hoped.

"I need scarcely tell you," he went on warmly, "that we should all feel deeply grateful to you if you would go to Warwitz and shoot a few of those bears."

"It might be rather fun," said Sir Almeric.

"There'll be a certain amount of risk about it."

Gyorgy enjoyed playing with this singularly foolish Englishman, and he felt that he was

doing it very well. He congratulated himself that he understood Sir Almeric thoroughly. The suggestion of possible risk was just the sort of thing that would appeal to him. It was very much to the credit of Gyorgy that he was able so far to enter into another man's feelings as to mention the possibility of risk. His own impulse would have been to give up all idea of an expedition which was in the least dangerous.

"And I'm afraid you'll be very uncomfortable," he went on. "There's no hotel in Warwitz, and you'll have to walk the last ten miles of the way there."

Englishmen—Gyorgy prided himself on his knowledge of the race—liked discomfort, and had no objection whatever to walking long distances.

"Oh, that's nothing," said Sir Almeric, "keeps a fellow fit, you know."

"Could you," said Gyorgy, "could you start to-day?"

"I don't see why not," said Sir Almeric. "I'm not doing anything particular here."

"I don't want to hurry you," said Gyorgy, "or to put you to any inconvenience. But the matter is rather urgent. The unfortunate people of Warwitz——"

"Poor devils," said Sir Almeric. "Naturally

they don't like having their babies eaten by bears."

Gyorgy went back to his office extremely well satisfied. He sat down at his piano and played the "Waldstein Sonata" right through with immense delight. He played it exceedingly well. Two hours later it was reported to him that Sir Almeric had actually started in his car with three guns and the valet who always accompanied him on his shooting expeditions.

Gyorgy scribbled a note to the French military adviser telling him that the mobilization of the Army might begin at once. Then he ate a heavy lunch, drank a bottle of wine and lay down on a comfortable sofa. He had been up all the night before at the Council meeting. He expected to be up most of the next night working at the stones above the picture of *Gula* in the cathedral. A man, however important his affairs, must have some sleep.

Sir Almeric, when Gyorgy left him, rang the bell which summoned his secretary, a Captain Alison, who had served with some distinction during the war.

"Alison," he said, "that nasty swine Gyorgy seems to take me for a fool."

Captain Alison, though perfectly loyal to his Chief, was somewhat of Gyorgy's opinion. He himself was a young man of considerable intel-

lectual power. Before the war he had written two small books on economics, most unorthodox and somewhat revolutionary in character. During the war he composed several poems which no one understood, which were therefore included in all anthologies of modern English verse. He had never shot anything except one sparrow; while still a boy, with a catapult. He was therefore inclined to be a little contemptuous of Sir Almeric, who cared nothing for economics and never wrote poems. He had accepted the post of secretary to the British High Commissioner in Dravidia, partly because it offered him an opportunity for studying the practical working of economic theories very like his own; chiefly because the secretaries of British High Commissioners are much better paid than either poets or Socialist pamphleteers.

"I may be a fool," said Sir Almeric, "but I'm not quite such an abject, irredeemable ass as that slimy Jew seems to think."

It was plain to Alison that Sir Almeric was seriously annoyed about something. He was a man of equable temper, accepting the worst that Gyorgy said or did with a shrug of the shoulders and a remark repeated till Alison was exceedingly tired of it: "What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?"

"He came in here this morning," said Sir

Almeric, "with a story that was simply an insult to any intelligent man. And he expected me to believe it, actually had the insolence to think he could take me in with a tale that a child of four would laugh at."

Since Sir Almeric came to Csaka, Gyorgy had made many statements which Alison did not believe, which it surprised him that anyone should believe. Sir Almeric accepted, or seemed to accept them all without protest or misgiving. Apparently the thing had gone too far this time. Alison wondered what Gyorgy could possibly have said to rouse this aggressive unbelief in Sir Almeric.

"He told me," said Sir Almeric, "that there were packs of fierce bears eating children, sheep and cows in a place called Warwitz, somewhere up in the mountains. Now what do you think of that?"

Alison, who knew nothing about bears, thought the story rather horrible and felt a good deal of sympathy for the people of Warwitz. He did not see why Sir Almeric should be angry with anyone, except perhaps the bears.

"He actually had the nerve," said Sir Almeric, "to suggest that I should go and shoot them."

"And are you going?"

"Am I going! Good Lord, Alison! Am I

going? Am I going to shoot man-eating bears, bears that go about in packs, bears that howl. Did you ever hear a bear howl, Alison?"

"Never," said Alison, and hoped he never would.

"Or eat a sheep, or——"

Sir Almeric's temper was rising fast, and he was unpleasantly conscious of the fact. He was a man who very rarely lost his temper, holding that a gentleman ought to be capable of self-control whatever happened. He shut his mouth with a snap, swallowed hard, and managed to get a grip on his anger. His face settled down into a grim smile.

"Now why did he tell me that story?" he said. "That's what I want to get at. Why?"

Alison realized that for some reason obscure to him the bear story was incredible, insultingly incredible.

"It looks to me," said Sir Almeric, "very much as if he wanted to get me out of Csaka for a few days so that he can have a free hand for some iniquity. That's what it looks like, isn't it?"

It did look like that, granting that the bear story was incredible. Alison said so.

"And he might have done it," said Sir Almeric. "He might have got me to go off somewhere if he'd set about it in a reasonable way.

I know I'm no match for a fellow like Gyorgy when it comes to politics and diplomacy and all that. I don't profess to be. I don't want to be. I'd be ashamed of myself if I was. But I do think I oughtn't to be treated as if I were a congenital idiot. He might have told me almost any other cursed lie and I'd have believed him. But I'm hanged if I stand that bear story. It's simply too thick."

"I wonder," said Alison thoughtfully, "why he wants to get rid of you. It certainly looks as if he did."

"Luckily," said Sir Almeric, "I didn't let the beast see that I didn't believe him. In fact I promised to go and shoot those bears. That's what he wanted, and I let him think I'd do it. I may not be a champion long-distance liar like Gyorgy, but I flatter myself that when I'm put to it I can convey a wrong impression as well as any man."

He could, in fact, convey a wrong impression much better than most men, because no one ever suspected him of wanting to. Karl Gyorgy, who regarded lying as the only intelligent kind of human intercourse, never dreamed of disbelieving Sir Almeric, whom he regarded as a man of no intelligence.

"Then you're not going?" said Alison.

"I am going," said Sir Almeric, "but I'm

not going to the Warwitz place to sit under a tree waiting for a pack of bears to go howling past with children in their mouths. Warwitz is too far off for me. I'm going to lie low somewhere within reach of Csaka until Gyorgy shows his hand and gets to work on whatever infernal devilment it is that he's contemplating. I don't know what he wants to do, but it's quite plain that he's afraid to do it as long as I'm on the spot. As soon as he thinks that I'm safe in Warwitz, twenty-four hours off in the mountains, he'll get to work. Then I'll drop on him and make him extremely sorry for himself."

"Where are you going?" said Alison.

"I'm going down to the marshes where I shoot geese in winter. I've got a little tin shanty there with a bed and a stove in it. I'll manage along all right, and you can bring me down word when things begin to happen here. It's not more than two hours run on your motor-bike."

"I've never been there," said Alison, "but I suppose I could find the way."

"You've got to," said Sir Almeric. "It's your job to find your way anywhere I tell you to go. Study it up on a map beforehand, but don't go and lose yourself. I shan't go straight there, of course. Gyorgy will have some of his

beastly spies watching to see me start. I shall go off in the direction of Warwitz, and when I'm five or six miles out I'll circle back and make my way clean round the town till I strike the road for the marshes."

Alison disliked this kind of schoolboy strategy. He would greatly have preferred to deceive Gyorgy, supposing it were necessary to deceive him, by one of the more orthodox diplomatic methods. He ventured on a feeble protest, suggesting that it was a little beneath the dignity of a British High Commissioner to hide in a bog. Sir Almeric listened ; but misunderstood him.

"You're perfectly right, Alison," he said. "It's playing it a bit low down, even on a hound like Karl Gyorgy, to go lurking for him like that. As a general rule I'd almost as soon listen at a keyhole. I don't like doing it, and that's a fact. And I wouldn't do it if he hadn't told me that bear story. That was simply an insult, and I'm not going to stand it. I don't know why I should. Now, are you clear about what you've got to do? Keep your eye lifting, and the moment you see preparations being made for a battue of peasants or bourgeois or anyone else, dart off and tell me. I expect it's a massacre of some kind on a large scale that Gyorgy has in mind. He knows I won't stand that

kind of thing. I've told him so scores of times. If he attempts anything of the sort he'll get it in the neck."

Karl Gyorgy would have slept less comfortably after lunch if he had seen Sir Almeric's car stop six miles out of Csaka, turn off into an exceedingly bad sideroad, bump over deep, dried ruts, crawl through stony water courses, and at last head due south towards the marshes. His pride would have suffered severely if he had known how completely he had failed to deceive the Englishman whom he despised ; but he would not in the very least have understood what was wrong with his bear story. That seemed to him exactly the kind of story which ought to delight any sportsman.

CHAPTER I

THE Orient Express rolled, with some show of dignity, into Budapest at 7 a.m. Roche, stiff and grimy, climbed down the steep steps of a sleeping car and stood in a pool of oily mud, while his suitcase was passed through the window of the car into the hands of a sulky-looking porter. There was the usual unpleasant scene in the gloomy hall where the officers of the Hungarian customs lurk for their prey. Two of them fastened on Roche's suitcase and made a fuss about his pyjamas. They asserted—in Hungarian, which Roche did not understand—that the pyjamas were new and therefore contraband. Roche explained—in English, which they did not understand—that there were no cigarettes concealed in the garments. The argument became heated, as most arguments do when the arguers cannot understand each other. Two policemen joined in. Several other travellers

tried to be helpful, in Rumanian, Czech and Bulgarian, languages which no one understood except the speakers. Roche, who began to be confused, tried Irish. He did not know much, but he remembered a phrase which meant "God bless the work," and is supposed to be used by peasants greeting each other in the field. This had the effect of infuriating both the customs officers and the police, and although Roche said "Sinn Fein" several times in a soothing tone, their tempers got worse. There might have been serious trouble if help had not come quite unexpectedly.

A tall man, wearing a light blue uniform, richly adorned with silver braiding, stepped up to Roche and bowed.

"I am Count Imre," he said, introducing himself, "and you are the Right Honourable Roche."

"Except for the Right Honourable, I am," said Roche.

For a moment or two the name Imre meant nothing to him. Then he recollected that the Grand Duchess had telegraphed that Count Imre was in command of her forces. If so, he ought to be able to deal with a few Hungarian customs officers.

"Please tell these brigands," said Roche, "that there are no cigarettes in the pockets of my pyjamas."

The sight of the uniform had already produced its effect upon the customs officers. It was a pre-revolutionary Dravidian uniform, and ought not to have carried any weight in Hungary. But its splendour was so great that the men were cowed. The Count made a long and fluent speech. The customs officers abased themselves, and the police drew back, as the police of all countries do when authority ranges itself against them, pretending that they had taken no part in the fray.

“ They have mistaken,” said the Count in halting English, “ saying that your smoking is new.”

“ But I am not smoking,” said Roche. “ Can’t they see that I’m not smoking without being told ? ”

The gilded youth of Budapest, leaders of fashion with plenty of money, use very elaborately decorated pyjamas in the same way as our grandfathers used dressing-gowns, not for sleeping in, but as comfortable suits for hours of ease and relaxation. They call them—borrowing and misusing an English word—‘ smokings.’ Roche did not recognize his pyjamas under this name, and thought he was being falsely accused of doing what the customs officers and police were doing themselves. The Count did not know the word pyjamas. He tried *Nacht Hosen*

and even *Nacht Hemd*, but failed to enlighten Roche.

He made another long speech to the customs officers, and was helped by a friendly lady who unfolded and displayed the pyjamas, pointing out that a button had been torn from the jacket, a plain proof that the pyjamas were not new. The Count talked on, talked, as it seemed to Roche, interminably.

"I have told them," he said, turning round at last, "that you are of the British Legation, and that all is right, in order. Good."

"I'm not," said Roche.

"But all is right now," said the Count.

It was, so far as the customs officers were concerned ; but the helpful lady traveller had disappeared, taking the pyjamas with her. The police, maintaining their attitude of strict neutrality, had watched her go without attempting to interfere with her. Roche was, of course, annoyed ; but he was comforted by the extraordinary outburst of invective with which the Count attacked the customs officers, the police and the remaining bystanders who had not stolen the pyjamas. Roche felt sure that all he would have liked to say was being said for him with a vigour which he himself could never have attained. It was only the splendour of the Count's uniform which saved him from

being arrested, perhaps lynched on the spot.

"I have told them," he said to Roche, "that all Hungarians are thieves."

The Hungarians say the same thing about the Dravidians, Count Imre's people, and about the Rumanians, the Czechs and the Serbs. The Dravidians, the Rumanians, Serbs and Czechs say it about the Hungarians and about each other. It is perhaps the only statement made in the Balkans which can be reckoned on as true, whoever makes it.

"What bothers me," said Roche, as they drove off in the taxi, "is the way the police stood by and watched that woman walk off with my pyjamas. What's the good of their wearing those enormous swords if they don't use them in a case like that?"

They reached the hotel and went up to the Grand Duchess's room. Roche found the old lady very little changed in appearance. She was wearing the same shabby bonnet in which he had first seen her, and the same rusty black skirt. Her maid, when Roche and the Count entered, was kneeling on the floor trying to wind a pair of puttees round the Grand Duchess's legs. The girl was unused to the garments, and in any case the Grand Duchess's calves, which were very thin, would have been difficult to fit. She was cursing the maid vigorously. She recognized

Roche's appearance by changing the language in which she swore, and using the worst English words she knew instead of their Dravidian equivalents. This must have been a relief to the maid and it helped Roche to feel at his ease.

He recognized in the puttees a sign that the Grand Duchess was preparing for active service.

The Count told the story of the loss of the pyjamas.

"All Hungarians are devils," said the Grand Duchess."

"The way the police behaved," said Roche, "was rather gratifying to me in one way."

"The police are corrupt," said the Grand Duchess, "like every one else in this accursed country."

"Either that, or singularly incompetent," said Roche. "I'm inclined to hope both. The way I look at the matter is this: if we had to deal with an efficient police force we shouldn't be able to do what we want to do. So far as I understand the position we intend to march an army out of Budapest with the avowed intention of attacking a neighbouring state with which Hungary has no particular quarrel."

"We're not going to attack anyone," said the Grand Duchess.

Count Imre twirled his moustache fiercely. He was a man who would have looked well at

the head of a cavalry charge, galloping horses, flashing sabres, tossing plumes, and perhaps a band playing martial music on a neighbouring hill. But in spite of his appearance his intentions were quite peaceable.

"We make no war," he said. "Not even do we chastise the canaille of the Red Army."

"Would you mind telling me," said Roche, "exactly what it is that we are going to do?"

The Grand Duchess shook her leg free of the puttee which was wound loosely round it, and aimed a kick at the maid's face, which the girl skilfully avoided. Then she invited Roche to sit down.

The Count, at her bidding, rang the bell, and a few minutes later breakfast was brought in, an excellent breakfast, with bacon and eggs as part of it, planned and specially ordered beforehand by the Grand Duchess. While Roche was eating she explained her plan. It was not that which Karl Gyorgy and the French military adviser expected her to adopt.

Count Imre had enrolled a small, a very small army. It consisted of about a hundred and fifty Dravidian noblemen, every man of them with a title and a pedigree which went back for hundreds of years. These were the officers. The rank and file were young Hungarians, belonging to the Awakening Hungary party, chiefly Uni-

versity students. There were between four and five hundred of them, all full of spirit and eager to do anything in the world except work. There had been more than a thousand of them the week before, bound over to serve the Grand Duchess against the Communists. Five hundred or so had backed out at the last moment.

"The Hungarians," said the Grand Duchess, "never keep their promises. Utter liars, all of them."

There the Grand Duchess was unjust to the Hungarians. It is quite true that they do not keep their promises. But it is not fair to call them liars on that account. Hungarians do not regard promises as things which ought to be, or are meant to be, kept. An Englishman, parting from a guest, says "Good-bye," which is a contraction of "God be with you." Very often, if his guest has been boring him, he really means "The devil take you." But he would be greatly surprised and a good deal hurt if anyone accused him of being a hypocritical liar because he says "God be with you" when he means "the devil take you." He knows, his guest knows, everybody else knows, that "Good-bye" is simply a formal phrase of politeness with no real meaning at all. A Hungarian regards a promise in exactly the same way and is bewildered when some literal minded Englishman expects him to keep

it ; hurt and insulted when he is called untrustworthy for not keeping it.

" I suppose they funked it at the last moment," said Roche, referring to the renegade five hundred.

" But no," said the Count. " They are not cowards, these Hungarians. It is that—it is only that——"

His English failed him and he turned to the Grand Duchess for help.

" They are staying here," she said, " in order to beat the Jews."

The Jewish students in the University—there were very few of them—had recently scored some successes in the examination rooms. The Hungarian students, unable to hold their own with pen and ink, made up their minds to show that they were the better men with sticks and clubs. The Grand Duchess highly approved of their resolve and forgave the young men who had deserted her as soon as she learned that they were undertaking a crusade of their own.

" Well," said Roche, " as we've only got a force of about six hundred, counting officers, it seems to me just as well that we're not going to attempt a regular invasion. What are we going to do ? "

The Grand Duchess went on with her account of the plan. The army, officers and men, would

leave Budapest unobtrusively in parties of ten or twelve. Already most of them had gone, those who had rifles taking them with them.

"Do you mean to say," said Roche, "that they're not all armed?"

Only about half the army had weapons, but the Grand Duchess did not regard this as at all a serious matter. Nor indeed was it. Roche understood that when he heard the rest of the plan. The various parties, having travelled by different trains or by motors, were to meet at an arranged rendezvous on the frontier, the very place from which Karl Gyorgy and the French military adviser expected the invasion to start. There the Count would take command and string his force out along the frontier, being very careful not to cross it. Karl Gyorgy's Red Army, so the Grand Duchess calculated, would march to the threatened point, there intrench themselves and wait to be attacked. Care had been taken that Gyorgy should have full and accurate information of the movements of the force so that he would be in no doubt about where to send his army.

"He'll send it all there," said the Grand Duchess, "every man and gun."

"And then?" said Roche. "What happens next?"

"Nothing happens," said the Grand Duchess.

"Gyorgy's Red Army will not dare to violate the frontier by attacking us. We shall not attack them."

"Seems rather a futile business," said Roche. "And what about the crown? That's what we're after, isn't it?"

"You and I," said the Grand Duchess, "will go round through the marshes, south of the two armies. We shall enter Csaka and take the crown. That's why I telegraphed to know if you could ride a bicycle."

"Oh!" said Roche.

The plan was farcical, absurd beyond what is permissible even in comic opera. It was a plan to be mocked, a grotesque caricature of a plan. But—when Roche thought it over he saw that it might possibly work. The threat of an invasion would certainly draw the Red Army to the frontier. Csaka would be left with perhaps a handful of police in it to keep order. A couple of unarmed bicyclists, one of them a woman, might perhaps make a detour by unfrequented roads and get into the city without attracting attention. The thing sounded insane, but it was feasible if . . . if . . . if . . .

Roche had a dozen "ifs" with which to trip up the Grand Duchess. If the distance were not too great. If she could find her way through the marshes she spoke of. If she knew exactly

where the crown was when she got to Csaka. If the crown would be any real use when she got it. If it possessed half the magical power she attributed to it. If . . . if . . .

But he got no chance of spreading out his ifs. The Grand Duchess seized him by the arm and dragged him into the bathroom which opened off her bedroom. There, propped up against the bath, was an old-fashioned bicycle designed for two riders, the sort of bicycle that used to be called a tandem.

She displayed it with pride. Roche gazed at it with horror. He had never ridden such a machine. He had not seen one for years. He supposed that none of them were left in existence. It looked very long, very ungainly and most unsafe.

"Wouldn't it be better," he said, "to hire a motor?"

"A motor," said the Grand Duchess, "could not go through those marshes. There are no roads, only paths."

"Well, a motor-bike then," said Roche, "with a side-car."

"Motor-bikes always break down," said the Grand Duchess. "Besides, they make a cursed noise, and we must go quietly."

Roche looked at the machine with increasing disgust.

Count Imre had followed them into the bathroom and was looking at the bicycle with pride, almost equal to that of the Grand Duchess.

"It will be right," he said. "In order. All right."

"If we've got to go by push-bike," said Roche, "why can't we have two of them, one each, and do the thing with some kind of decency. I—I really don't care for going about the country on that thing."

"Damn decency," said the Grand Duchess. "I'm old enough to be indecent if I choose."

"And also," said Count Imre, "Her Highness cannot ride a bicycle."

"Good Lord!" said Roche.

"You see," said the Grand Duchess, "I am quite ready, and I understand what we are in for."

"She pulled up her skirt a little and stretched out her left leg. The maid had succeeded in loosely attaching the puttee to it.

"The Count told me," she said, "that these puttees are the correct thing, the *dernier cri* for cycling."

"They'll be a help, no doubt," said Roche, "if they stay on, but—I say, couldn't you take one of those Awakening Hungarians with you instead of me? I am not as young as I was. I am sure that an Awakening Hungarian would

be ever so much stronger than I am. Or one of your own nobles. What about you, Imre? Be a man and try it. I don't mind taking over command of the army."

"It was you," said the Grand Duchess, "who discovered the secret of the hiding-place of the crown."

"I fluked on the meaning of Saligia," said Roche. "But I have no more idea where the crown is than your maid has. So if you're counting on me to find it——"

"Therefore," said the Grand Duchess solemnly, "the glory of restoring it to Dravidia must be yours."

"I don't in the least mind giving away the glory," said Roche, "to an Awakening Hungarian, or Count Imre, or anyone."

"Besides," said the Grand Duchess, "I have consulted the amber. After fasting for a whole day I inquired, and——"

"Of course," said Roche, "if those beads say I'm to go I must. When do we actually start?"

"To-night," said the Grand Duchess. "To-morrow morning we reach the frontier. And now perhaps you'd like a bath."

She moved the tandem bicycle, turned on the hot water, spread a large towel over the back of a chair, arranged a mat on the floor, produced soap and a bath sponge. Then, with a motherly

smile on her crooked face, she left the room taking Count Imre with her. Roche was relieved. After hearing her damn decency he was rather afraid that she might stay and wash him. She seemed quite capable of it.

CHAPTER II

THE night mail leaves Budapest for Csaka at 11 p.m. and is timed to reach the frontier station at six o'clock next morning. Count Imre and Roche shared one cabin in the sleeping car. The Grand Duchess and her long-suffering maid had another. The Count, an old campaigner no doubt, slipped into his berth and was sound asleep before the train started. Roche was less fortunate. It was his third consecutive night in the train, and his nerves were too rattled to allow him to sleep. Besides, he was troubled about his new adventure. There were several questions which he wanted to ask the Grand Duchess. He was wondering whether he might venture to visit her in her compartment, when there was a knock at his door and the Grand Duchess put in her head.

"I want to talk to you," she said. "But per-

haps we'd better not talk here. The Count might wake."

The Count showed no sign of waking. He was snoring loudly and steadily.

"My maid doesn't understand a word of English," said the Grand Duchess, "so even if she stays awake it won't matter. Come along."

Roche followed her into her compartment. The maid was laying out the Grand Duchess's faded blue dressing-gown and bedroom slippers. She was at once ordered into the upper berth. To get into the upper berth of a continental sleeping car when a train is in full flight over a badly laid line is a gymnastic feat. To do it while two other people occupy the narrow compartment requires great skill. The maid, though an active girl, struggled in vain for awhile. The Grand Duchess, becoming impatient, pinched the calf of her leg sharply, and this acted as a spur does on a weary horse, impelling the girl to spasmodic activity. The Grand Duchess and Roche sat down side by side on the lower berth, a most uncomfortable business for Roche, who had to huddle up with his back curved to avoid hitting his head.

"There's just one thing I'm not quite satisfied about," said the Grand Duchess.

"You're lucky," said Roche. "There are at least a dozen things which make me acutely

anxious. In the first place, how far have we got to ride that bicycle? "

"From the edge of the marshes to Csaka is a little more than forty kilometres," said the Grand Duchess. "Nothing worth speaking of. The Count says we ought to do it easily in five hours."

"If Count Imre thinks he can push that bicycle forty kilometres in five hours, I wish he'd take on the job instead of me."

"I've allowed three hours for getting through the marshes," the Grand Duchess went on. "I don't suppose we'll take so long, but we may. There's nothing there that you could call exactly a road."

"And you really think," said Roche, "that we can do that on a tandem, when you've never ridden a bicycle in your life? "

"We shall do it. It has been made clear to me we shall do it. Have no fear."

She spoke in the calm remote tone which Roche knew well. It was the way she always spoke when she was under the influence of mystic inspiration. Her amber beads were round her neck. She began passing them along their string with her fingers. Roche liked and even admired everything about the Grand Duchess except her mysticism.

"I hope you know the way," he said abruptly.

The Grand Duchess dropped back into the commonplace at once.

"I'll find it," she said. "I've allowed three hours for those marshes, which gives us time to lose ourselves half a dozen times. We could swim the pools in that time."

"Carrying that bicycle on our backs, I suppose," said Roche.

The Grand Duchess took his hand and patted it. Then she stroked his cheek gently.

"Don't be nervous," she said. "We don't want to be in Csaka before dark. It won't take us more than an hour to reach the marshes from the place we leave the train. We've time to burn. So long as we get to Csaka by nine o'clock——"

"We'll never get there at all," said Roche.

This time the Grand Duchess stroked his hair, which ought to have soothed him. Indeed, it would have soothed him if he had allowed her to go on. But he did not want to be soothed. He shifted along the berth on which they were sitting to the end farthest from the Grand Duchess. He tried to sit upright, and hit his head sharply. This completely did away with the effect of the Grand Duchess's soothing.

"I suppose," he said bitterly, "that we're taking that maid of yours with us."

"No, we're not. She'd be no use at all."

“She’d be of the greatest use,” said Roche. “She could push the bicycle from behind. We’ll want some one to do that. She could tie on your puttees when they come off. I know they’ll keep coming off all day. Besides, if a crocodile attacked us in those marshes we could give it the girl to eat while we escaped with the bicycle.”

“That,” said the Grand Duchess, “is one of your English jokes. I told you that I am never able to understand English jokes. There’s no fun in them.”

“There’s a great deal more than there is in your Dravidian jokes,” said Roche. “I don’t see the slightest fun in pushing that beastly tandem bicycle through a bog and over forty miles of road. That seems to me about the worst joke I’ve ever come across.”

“But that is not a joke,” said the Grand Duchess.

“If it’s not a joke,” said Roche, “what on earth is it?”

Instead of asking, the Grand Duchess wriggled out of her berth, opened her suitcase and took out a bottle of eau-de-Cologne and a pocket-handkerchief. Then, before he realized what she was doing, she lifted Roche’s legs, pulled him a little way along the berth, and laid him down. She dabbed the scent on his forehead with the

pocket-handkerchief and massaged his neck with slow, firm strokes of her fingers.

"You are nervous," she said, "very nervous. But you'll feel better in a minute or two."

She was perfectly right. Roche very soon did feel better. So much better that he was ashamed of having lost his temper.

"I'm sorry," he said, sitting up again. "I oughtn't to have said that about giving your maid to a crocodile."

"There are no crocodiles," said the Grand Duchess. "But if there were you might give that girl to them without annoying me in the least. In fact, if you want to kill her you damned well can, at once, if you like."

"But I don't," said Roche hurriedly. "I don't in the least."

The Grand Duchess seemed a little puzzled.

"I wish," she said, "that I could understand English jokes."

Roche made an effort to get away from the subject of jokes, back to the pressing business of the next day.

"What are we going to do when we get to Csaka?" he asked; "supposing we ever do get there, which seems to me unlikely."

"We shall take the crown," said the Grand Duchess. "We shall take it from the place where the King and the Archimandrite hid it."

Then——” She was standing up and the light from the roof of the cabin fell full on her face. Roche saw her eyes flash and a look of enthusiasm illuminate the twisted ugliness of her mouth and cheek. He knew what he had to expect—a rhetorical tirade about the Dravidian crown, its strange powers and the passionate loyalty of the people to it. He felt that if the Grand Duchess got fairly started his “Nervousness”—her charitable word for bad temper—would return to him again. Then he would disgrace himself by saying abominably rude things.

“But do you know where the crown is?” he said.

“You have told me.”

“But I don’t know myself,” said Roche. “All I know is that Saligia means the Seven Deadly Sins, and what they have to do with the crown beats me.”

“Surely,” said the Grand Duchess, “you remember the pictures of the Seven Deadly Sins on the west wall of the cathedral of Csaka?”

“No, I don’t. How could I remember pictures I’ve never seen in a place I’ve never been to?”

“But,” said the Grand Duchess, “they are famous all over the world. They are the ugliest mosaics ever made.”

“They may be. But I never heard of them.”

He would not yet admit it, but he was beginning to see what Saligia had to do with the hiding-place of the crown. If there really were pictures of the sins on the wall of the cathedral the crown might have been hidden among them, behind one of them or under it. The Grand Duchess spoke of them as mosaics. Perhaps a hole had been made in one, or in the masonry above or below. The light which the Grand Duchess had thrown on the irritating Saligia mystery did more than the scent or the massage to restore Roche to cheerfulness and hope. The expedition on the tandem bicycle still seemed to him insane. The military operations of Count Irme, with his awakened Hungarians, were little better than extravagant farce. But he began to see that there was a real object in view, that the Dravidian crown might actually be attainable, whatever it was worth when they got it.

“ I wish,” said the Grand Duchess, “ that the Archimandrite had given us a hint which picture to search. There are seven of them. That’s what I meant when I said that there is one thing I’m not quite satisfied about. That’s what I want to talk to you about. You’re not nervous any more, are you ? ”

“ Not in the least,” said Roche. “ I’m as keen as you are on finding that crown. At least,

I'm nearly as keen. Anyhow, I'm going to do all I can to help you."

"Can you think of anything in the Archimandrite's verse," said the Grand Duchess, "which would give us the slightest help in finding out which picture he chose. It would take us a long time to search the whole seven, and we might be interrupted. If that accursed Gyorgy or any of his Communists found us in the cathedral—my God!"

"They'd shoot, I suppose," said Roche.

"We'd find ourselves wishing they would shoot before they'd done with us," said the Grand Duchess. "That's why we must lay our hands on the crown as quickly as we can. And if we only knew which picture it was—— Surely the Archimandrite must have given us a hint if we could only find it."

Roche repeated the hexameter aloud. He muttered it over softly. He wrote it down and stared at it. Then suddenly a flash of recollection came to him. There was an accent somewhere, on one of the syllables, which had no business to be there.

"Have you his pectoral cross with you?" he asked.

The Grand Duchess had. It was in the same place in which it had been every day since she first received it, deep down inside her clothes.

She tugged at the ribbon round her neck and dragged it up. Roche seized it eagerly. There was the accent he recollected, a circumflex over the final a of Saligia. Taken as it stood it put Saligia into the ablative case and translation became impossible. It made the a long and spoiled the dactyl necessary for scanning the verse. The Archimandrite could not have meant to spoil both sense and scansion. He must have meant something else by the circumflex. Roche pointed it out to the Grand Duchess.

"There," he said, "there's what we want. That accent must have been meant as a pointer. Otherwise it's simply absurd."

"The final a," said the Grand Duchess. "The last picture."

"As well as I recollect," said Roche, "a sin called Accedia."

"Damn the silly old sin," said the Duchess. "We've got what we want. Let's have a drink."

The maid, who had fallen asleep, was dragged from her berth by the Grand Duchess and sent off to the conductor of the sleeping car. She was told to bring back champagne, or if that were not available, Tokay, or white wine, or red wine. She returned with some Hungarian brandy, a powerful liquor with a coarse taste. The Grand Duchess and Roche drank it, mixed with tepid

water, using in turns the tumbler provided by the sleeping car company for passengers who want to wash their teeth. They pledged the Dravidian crown, the army of Count Imre, including the Awakening Hungarians, the Archimandrite and the Seven Deadly Sins, especially Accedia. Roche made a little speech about Accedia. It was a sin, so he said, which would never beset the Grand Duchess, which he proposed to practise all the rest of his life when he had done with the affair of the Dravidian crown. The Grand Duchess listened to him, and when he had finished complained plaintively of the obscurity of English jokes.

Roche staggered back to his own cabin and sank into a dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER III

THE Grand Duchess and Roche made their start next morning at half-past seven. The road ran down hill in the direction of the marshes, a very fortunate thing. The Grand Duchess was able to establish herself on the back seat and get used to her position before there was any need for her to begin pedalling. Roche, deceived by

the slope, hoped that his labour was not going to be as severe as he expected. The Awakening Hungarians stood in rows along the side of the road and cheered. All Hungarians are good at cheering and can be counted on with confidence so long as they are not expected to do anything else. The nobles, the officers of the Grand Duchess's Army, all in splendid uniforms, sang the old Royalist National Anthem of their country. Count Imre, mounted on a horse which he had borrowed from a neighbouring farmer, galloped along beside the bicycle for several hundred yards, waving his sword. A touch of pathos was added to the scene by the Grand Duchess's maid who sat at the side of the road and wailed aloud at the thought of being parted from her beloved mistress.

As soon as the bicycle disappeared Count Imre trotted back again and took up the work of organizing his army. He established a line of posts along the frontier for half a mile or so on each side of the railway line. He proposed that each detachment should dig trenches in front of its own position, but soon found that this could not be done. The Dravidian nobles were quite ready to oversee the digging, but being nobles and officers would not dig themselves. The Awakening Hungarians, like all Hungarians, awake or asleep, intensely disliked the idea of

doing any sort of work, either physical or mental. Their plan was to sit about in groups drinking coffee and talking politics until somebody came and attacked them—a very creditable reproduction of the normal life of Budapest.

Many generals would have been vexed by the refusal of an army to dig trenches. Count Imre was not troubled at all. He knew that trenches, even if dug, would be quite useless. As long as he kept his men on the right side of the frontier and did not march into Dravidian territory the Red Army would leave him alone. He spent a long and happy day trotting about from post to post on his borrowed horse, encouraging the Awakening Hungarians to talk politics and drink coffee. Fortunately there was plenty of coffee. The provisioning of the army had been arranged by the Grand Duchess and was uncommonly well done.

In the course of the day Count Imre borrowed or hired ten other horses and was able to mount the greater part of his personal staff. With these gentlemen clattering behind him he rode from time to time to the top of a little hill behind the railway to see if the Dravidian army was approaching. It was an acute disappointment to him that he never caught sight of a single Red scout. He would have liked the enemy to discover him seated on a horse, a pair of field-

glasses held to his eyes, surrounded by staff officers, in uniforms of extraordinary brilliance. That was Count Imre's idea of what war ought to be like, before the cavalry charges began.

The Red Army, meanwhile, was acting on the plan drawn up by the French military adviser. Six miles back from the frontier the road was heavily barricaded, trenches dug on each side of it and emplacements made for machine guns. The invading army would certainly have to halt when it came to the barricades. On each side of the road, for a couple of miles beyond the frontier, strong parties of men were concealed under reliable officers, each with a couple of machine guns. Their orders were to wait till the invading army marched past them, and then to close in on its rear when it was held up by the barricade. It was an excellent plan, worthy of the brain of a Frenchman with the experience of the Great War behind him. It would have worked out admirably, if the invading army had invaded, which is, after all, the proper business of an invading army.

Unfortunately, the Grand Duchess, who made the plans for her army, had not a military mind and was never at any time in her life hampered by respect for the proper thing to do. Her army made no attempt to invade. It sat still and drank coffee. A few miles off the Red Army sat still without any coffee to drink, for its com-

missariat was not well organized. Meanwhile the Grand Duchess and Roche struggled along on the tandem bicycle.

They made a good start, entering the marshes by a broad firm track which looked as if it led somewhere. The Grand Duchess, having got accustomed to her seat, pedalled with extraordinary vigour. Roche did his best, and began to feel really hopeful. But the work grew harder and harder for the track grew softer and softer. At the end of a mile the sweat was running down Roche's face and he could hear the Grand Duchess panting behind him. At last they were forced to dismount and tried dragging the bicycle along. They covered another hundred yards, sinking deeper and deeper into mire. Then their track disappeared altogether in a jungle of tall reeds, beyond which they could see the waters of a broad lagoon.

Roche was a little discouraged, but the Grand Duchess remained quite undaunted. They struggled back again to the starting place of their track and skirted along the edge of the marsh till they came to another path. They were a little more fortunate with this one. It led them along a narrow peninsula which stretched out far into the marsh, so far that the Grand Duchess estimated that the end of it must be nearly half-way across. Off the end of the peninsula, per-

haps forty yards out into the water, was a small island, thickly grown over with stunted trees. Tied to one of the trees was a shallow, flat-bottomed boat. The Grand Duchess gave a joyful little cheer. Roche felt less jubilant. It was clearly his business to get the boat, and he did not like the job. The water might be deep. It was certainly dark and slimy. The bottom was likely to be very soft.

He took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his trousers as far as possible, and waded in. The bottom was soft and seemed to get softer as he went on. He sank above his knees, up to his thighs. He pulled his feet out of the mud with great difficulty after each step. The Grand Duchess shouted encouragement from the end of the peninsula. Roche reached the island, very muddy, wet to the middle, and a good deal exhausted. The boat had two oars in it, but it was half full of water and there was no bailer. He paddled back.

He and the Grand Duchess, after immense toil, hauled the boat ashore, turned her over and emptied her out. She was covered thickly inside with green slime and long weeds covered her bottom. They launched her again. The Grand Duchess perched herself in the bow. Roche laid the bicycle across the stern, climbed in amidships and pushed off. It was obvious at once that the

boat was leaking badly. There was no use landing on the little island. The Grand Duchess would not hear of going back. The nearest point on the far side of the lagoon was at least two hundred yards away. Roche glanced hopelessly over his shoulder and then rowed with all his might. The water oozed in. As the heavily laden boat sank deeper it trickled in little streams between the planks. The work of rowing became harder and harder. The Grand Duchess reported progress from the bow.

“Half-way across.”

The water in the boat was up to Roche’s ankles.

“Eighty yards more.”

The water rose. The boat moved very sluggishly.

“Sixty yards. . . . Forty yards.”

Roche tugged. The boat hung heavily. The water rose.

“Twenty yards. . . . Ten yards.”

The boat sank.

Roche sat helplessly up to his middle in water. The boat heeled slowly over sideways, and the bicycle slid off into the lagoon. The Grand Duchess was overboard in an instant and grasped it. Roche struggled after her. Splashing, slipping, sinking in the mud, they tugged the bicycle towards the shore.

“Damn,” said the Grand Duchess. “One of my puttees has come off.”

It had done worse than come off. It had wound itself round the chain and the rear wheel of the bicycle, while one end of it still clung to the Grand Duchess’s leg.

“That idiot,” said the Grand Duchess, “why didn’t she fix it tight?”

She was speaking about her maid, who was at that moment flirting with an Awakening Hungarian over a cup of coffee.

“She shall be spanked for this when I catch her,” said the Grand Duchess.

Roche worked at the puttee, disentangling it slowly. The Grand Duchess, tethered helplessly, gave details of the manner and severity of the spanking which was in store for the maid. Roche was almost immersed in cold water, but the things which the Grand Duchess said made him blush.

After another half-hour of toil they got the bicycle ashore. The Grand Duchess untied the tape which still held the trailing puttee to her leg, gathered it into a bundle and flung it into the lagoon.

“If the other comes loose,” she said, “I’ll do the same with it. I’m better without those things, anyhow.”

“What are we going to do now?” said Roche.

"Go on, of course," said the Grand Duchess.

Roche looked at the lagoon and the gunwale of the sunk boat and realized that by no possibility could they go back.

"Very well," he said, "but we'll have to clean up the bicycle a bit. I don't believe we could ride it in the state it's in now. The mud's half an inch thick all over it."

The Grand Duchess sacrificed, without regret, her other puttee, and the worst of the mud was wiped off the more important parts of the bicycle.

"Before we start again," said the Grand Duchess, "we'd be the better for something to eat."

It was certainly time for luncheon. Roche's watch had stopped, as watches do when plunged into muddy water. But the sun was far past the meridian, and his appetite told him plainly that it was time for a meal. He looked helplessly and hungrily at the Grand Duchess, wondering where the food was to come from. The Grand Duchess pulled up the first and the second of the skirts she wore. From a huge pocket, sewed on to the third skirt, she took a tin sandwich case and a flask of considerable size.

"Quite dry," she said. "That's why I held up my petticoats so high when the boat sank. But perhaps you didn't notice that."

Roche had noticed it, but was too modest to say so. The Grand Duchess smiled at him amiably.

"It's a long time since I was young enough to be modest," she said.

The Grand Duchess spread out her sandwiches, made of *pâté de foie gras* the day before in the Ritz hotel in Budapest and kept fresh by wrappings of lettuce leaves. She unscrewed the top of her flask and poured out some excellent Tokay for Roche.

He was extremely hungry and the wine cheered him. Only when he had eaten and drunk a good deal more than his proper share did he notice that the Grand Duchess was doing no more than nibble a single sandwich. Roche was ashamed of himself, but the old lady pressed the remains of the sandwiches on him.

"At my age," she said, "one doesn't want food. A young man like you does. All I'm sorry for is that I haven't more for you."

A schoolboy really believes that his mother does not herself want the chocolates which she offers him. A girl, dressing for a ball, takes without scruple her mother's best pair of silk stockings. At the age reached by mothers of grown-up daughters silk stockings must have ceased to be attractive things. The Grand Duchess's manner was maternal. There was no

doubt that she really wanted to feed Roche. His appetite was undiminished. With a heart full of self-contempt he ate the sandwiches and drank almost all the Tokay.

Then they set forth again. There was no semblance of a track. The ground was very soft. Now and then they had to force their way through groves of thick-stemmed rushes. A tandem bicycle is an incredibly difficult thing to drag along, but they were cheered by the sight, a mile or so further on, of high ground, cultivated ground divided into fields. Between them and that desirable land there might be morasses and lagoons ; but the border of the marshes was at last in sight.

From far off, uncertainly at first and then more clearly, came a sound of hooting. They stood still and listened. A faint breeze stirred and bore the sound to them.

"A motor horn," said Roche. "We'd better make for it."

"Better keep clear of it," said the Grand Duchess. "We're in Dravidia now, and if there's a motor it's sure to be one which that devil Karl Gyorgy has sent out to capture us."

Roche would have liked the succour of a friendly motor-car, but he had no more wish than the Grand Duchess had to be captured by Dravidian Communists. He agreed to make a detour,

moving towards the right, in order to pass the car unseen. That unfortunately proved to be impossible. The further they went to the right the deeper they plunged into impassable bogs. They tried a detour in the opposite direction, but immediately came to a lagoon on which there was no boat. The Grand Duchess refused to stay where they were.

"We must go on somehow," she said, "if we want to get to Csaka."

Roche saw very little chance of doing that. It was far on in the afternoon already, and they had forty kilometres to ride when they got through the marshes. But he agreed that the only thing to do was to face the motor.

The hooting went on continuously, sounding louder and louder.

"Now, what the devil," said the Grand Duchess, "makes the fool go on blowing his horn like that? You'd think to listen to him that he was sending out signals of distress."

That, in fact, was exactly what the motorist was doing. Captain Alison, hastening to his chief with the news of the mobilization of the Red Army, had missed his way and hopelessly bogged his motor-cycle.

"An Englishman," said the Grand Duchess, when she and Roche came in sight of him.

She had a keen eye for clothes and recognized

that the tweed suit worn by Alison could not have been made anywhere except in London.

Alison, standing beside his half-buried cycle, pounded away at the Klaxon horn, in the hope of attracting the attention of some one who would help him.

"And there's another Englishman," said Roche.

It was Sir Almeric Cloote. He had heard from far off the appealing barks of the Klaxon horn, guessed that his secretary was in trouble and was coming to the rescue. No one except an Englishman, an Englishman of the public school and university class, would have looked as Sir Almeric did in the middle of a Dravidian bog. From his cap to his boots, splashed but still shiny, he looked what he was, a gentleman and a sportsman. Count Imre, an aristocrat of lineage reaching back to the middle ages, sometimes looked like a gentleman but not a sportsman. At other times he looked like a sportsman who is not a gentleman. He never achieved the poise, the perfect balance between the two which came naturally to Sir Almeric.

"It's all right," said the Grand Duchess. "I know that man. I can't remember his name, but I met him once at a shooting party at Prince Itolf's at his place in the Ural mountains."

CHAPTER IV

THE Grand Duchess and Roche, dragging their tandem bicycle, and Sir Almeric, swinging along from the opposite direction, reached Alison about the same time. He went on pounding his Klaxon horn up to the last moment. He had seen the Grand Duchess and Roche approaching, and was distrustful of their appearance. They might very well have been marauding brigands waiting to prey on travellers in difficulties. He seemed to think that the noise of the horn might frighten brigands away, a perfectly intelligible and reasonable belief, for Klaxon horns make an odious noise, and all Dravidians, especially the gipsies and criminal classes, are intensely musical.

Sir Almeric ordered him to stop the abominable noise. Alison, catching sight of his chief, regained his courage. The Grand Duchess approached Sir Almeric with dignity, and held out her hand to him.

"I think we've met before," she said.

She was soaked with water and plastered with mud. Her bonnet was hanging back from her grey hair by its string. Her face seemed crookeder than ever; but she had the manner of a *grande dame*.

Sir Almeric had experience enough of the world to recognize a lady when he saw one, even disguised in mud-saturated garments. He took off his hat and bowed politely, but he looked puzzled. By no effort could he recall the face of the Grand Duchess.

"At Prince Itolf's," said the Grand Duchess, "in 1910. I don't wonder you don't recognize me. I was a great deal younger then, and my face wasn't all twisted up. You've changed very little, but I can't for the life of me remember your name."

Sir Almeric introduced himself. Roche introduced the Grand Duchess.

"Ah," said Sir Almeric. "I recollect now. I recollect perfectly. Stupid of me not to have known you at once. And this gentleman——? Your son, perhaps?"

He turned to Roche and held out his hand.

"No," said Roche, "not a son. In fact, no relation. My name is Roche, Dermot Drelin-court Roche, Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin."

"Ah!" said Sir Almeric.

He was too much puzzled to say anything more for the moment. It was difficult enough to account for the presence of the Grand Duchess in the middle of the Dravidian bog. But Dravidia was at all events her country. How a don

from an Irish university got there it was utterly impossible to guess.

"We're on our way to Csaka," said the Grand Duchess.

Then Captain Alison joined in the conversation. He was a young man who liked to be prominent, and he was inclined to resent the way in which he had been ignored so far. Besides, he had information, startlingly important information, to give.

"You can't go to Csaka," he said. "There's a revolution going on there."

"Revolutions be damned," said the Grand Duchess. "I'm going."

"Surely," said Roche, "there can't be another revolution. They're Communists already. There's nothing else to revolute to. I mean to say, they must have pretty nearly reached the limit."

"I was on my way to tell you, sir," said Alison to Sir Almeric, "that almost immediately after you left Csaka, the army was mobilized, and yesterday it marched out of the city. That means a revolution."

"It means nothing of the sort," said the Grand Duchess brusquely. "That nasty Jew Gyorgy has sent out his soldiers to repel an invasion. That's all."

"Can you tell me any more about it?" said

Sir Almeric. "It's part of my job to know these little things, and I'm ashamed to say this is the first I've heard of this affair. Who's invading Dravidia?"

"I am," said the Grand Duchess.

"To be quite accurate," said Roche, "it isn't an invasion. Merely a demonstration in force. Count Imre, who's at the head of the Grand Duchess's army, has orders——"

"Count Imre," said Sir Almeric. "Now how does Count Imre come into it? Last time I saw him was at a fancy dress ball in the American Legation at Prague. He was got up as an Apache, I remember. But even so I shouldn't have thought him capable of starting a new Balkan war."

"I've taken him on," said the Grand Duchess, "as Commander-in-Chief of my army."

"Which is entrenched on the other side of the frontier," said Roche, "with the Dravidian Army watching it. At least, that's what we hope is happening. There ought not to be any fighting."

"The two armies will simply scowl at each other," said the Grand Duchess, "while Mr. Roche and I slip round into Csaka."

"An unofficial visit?" asked Sir Almeric.

"Strictly private business," said the Grand Duchess.

"But surely you don't mean to go on that bicycle?"

Sir Almeric examined the muddy tandem with some curiosity. It did not look as if it were fit for the journey. Neither Roche nor the Grand Duchess looked as if they could ride it very far.

"I hope," he said, "that you will allow me to send you into Csaka in my car. I have it here in a shed behind the little house in which I am staying. You'll do the journey in two hours."

"We don't want to be there before dark," said the Grand Duchess. "Ours is the sort of business that's better done after dark. If anyone recognized us we might be stopped."

"I fly the English flag on my car," said Sir Almeric. "I don't think anyone will stop it. But if you think it's safer I'll drive you there myself."

Captain Alison, who was a cautious young man, took his chief by the arm and drew him apart. He made a strong remonstrance against the lending of the car. The Grand Duchess, by her own account, was responsible for an army which at that moment was threatening to invade Dravidia. To allow her to drive into Csaka under the shelter of the Union Jack would be a grave breach of diplomatic privileges.

"Don't be an ass," said Sir Almeric. "I'm lending my car to a lady who is an old friend of

mine whose bicycle has broken down in a bog. There's nothing diplomatic about that."

"The Foreign Office——" said Alison. "The policy of the present Government——"

The Foreign Office was a long way off, and Sir Almeric strongly disapproved of the policy of the Government, which was one of leniency towards Karl Gyorgy.

"If she assassinates Gyorgy," said Alison, "and it comes out afterwards that she got into Csaka in your car——"

"Jolly good job if she does assassinate Gyorgy," said Sir Almeric. "That fellow's an utter swine. But she won't. Hang it all, Alison, she's too old. Gyorgy would be much more likely to assassinate her if they met."

"But the man with her," said Alison. "He's an Irishman. He said so."

During the recent troubles in Ireland Captain Alison, like most English progressive thinkers, had highly approved of murder. But the rights and wrongs of that kind of political action are quite different when the threat is directed against a respected Communist leader, instead of a mere loyalist.

Sir Almeric turned to the Grand Duchess.

"Do you intend to assassinate Karl Gyorgy?" he said.

"That's not what we're going to Csaka for,"

said the Grand Duchess, "but of course if we happen to meet him——"

Roche interrupted her. He did not want to lose the chance of being driven into Csaka in a car, and was afraid that Sir Almeric might withdraw his offer of the car if he became suspicious about their business.

"We're not going to assassinate anyone," he said.

"Alison, my secretary," said Sir Almeric, "thinks you are. He says you are an Irishman."

"So I am. But not that kind of Irishman."

"There now, Alison," said Sir Almeric, "that removes your objection, I hope."

"Karl Gyorgy," said the Grand Duchess, "ought to be assassinated."

"Say executed," said Sir Almeric, "and I agree with you."

"But we don't mean to do it," said Roche. "I assure you——"

"Please listen to me, sir, for one minute," said Alison to his chief. "This lady, who is well known all over Europe as a political plotter——"

"She's a friend of mine," said Sir Almeric. "I met her once at a shooting party."

"—Turns up here in company with an Irish revolutionary——"

"If you call me a revolutionary," said Roche, "I'll smash your head."

"We don't know what their business in Csaka is," said Alison, "but we do know——"

"Our business," said the Grand Duchess, "is simply——"

"We're going to Csaka," Roche interrupted her, "to investigate the Seven Deadly Sins."

The Grand Duchess chuckled. She had at last seen what she took for an English joke. Alison stood silent with his mouth open. Sir Almeric, after a moment's struggle with himself, recovered from this amazing announcement sufficiently to speak.

"They're all there," he said. "I never knew a place where they flourish more luxuriantly."

"And I assure you," said Roche, "murder isn't one of them. You'd think it was sure of a place on the list. But it isn't even mentioned."

"I hope that satisfies you, Alison," said Sir Almeric. "It ought to."

It did not satisfy, it merely confused Alison. The sudden introduction of the Seven Deadly Sins into the conversation left him gasping.

"Anyhow," said Sir Almeric, "I don't in the least want to know what your business is. I'd much rather not know. All that matters to

me is that I meet a very charming lady"—he bowed to the Grand Duchess, who stretched out a muddy hand; Sir Almeric bent over it and kissed it—"and an eminent professor from a famous university. They have lost their way in a bog, and I offer them the use of my car. There can't be any possible objection to that, Alison. Neither the F.O. nor the Government can have a word to say. If by any chance Karl Gyorgy meets with an accident——"

"He won't," said Roche, "if I can possibly help it."

"I shan't go into mourning if he does," said Sir Almeric. "A man who treats me as if I were a born fool, coming to me with a story about bears which an infant schoolchild wouldn't swallow, expecting me to believe it, deserves what he gets."

"He's a Jew," said the Grand Duchess. "But we shan't have time to kill him to-night. We must get out of Csaka as quickly as we can after we've——"

"Investigated the Seven Deadly Sins," said Roche.

He did not want the Grand Duchess to say anything about the crown. Sir Almeric could hardly be expected to lend his car to the heads of a Royalist conspiracy, however much he disliked Karl Gyorgy.

"And that won't take us long," Roche added.

"An hour at the outside," said the Grand Duchess.

"I'll wait for you with the car," said Sir Almeric, "and bring you back again, if you think of returning this way."

"It's the only way we can return," said Roche, "with two armies lining up along the frontier north of us."

Alison, profoundly disgusted, and very much annoyed with his chief, was left to guard his own motor bicycle and the Grand Duchess's tandem, until Sir Almeric's servant could be sent down to help him.

A path, narrow and winding but fairly dry, led to the little hut which Sir Almeric had established on the edge of the marshes.

"This is a poor place to entertain you in," said Sir Almeric, "but if you don't want to be in Csaka till after dark, we've a couple of hours before we start, and I'm sure we'd all be the better for something to eat."

It was plain that the Grand Duchess and Roche would also be the better for a wash, and Roche said so.

"I've no bathroom," said Sir Almeric, "but there's an india-rubber tub and plenty of soap. I'll boil up some water."

"I don't see much use in washing," said the Grand Duchess. "We'll be dirty again before we've finished."

"All the same——" said Roche.

"You can if you like," said the Grand Duchess. "I shan't."

Roche, with a kettle of hot water and Sir Almeric's rubber bath, got rid of the worst of the mud which covered him.

The Grand Duchess took control of Sir Almeric's kitchen. The servant had gone to help Captain Alison. Sir Almeric, who was an excellent cook, intended to prepare a meal himself. But the Grand Duchess told him bluntly that cooking was not his business. She insisted that he should sit down and smoke while she made an omelet and fried some steaks.

The party started for Csaka shortly after seven o'clock. Sir Almeric drove. The Grand Duchess sat beside him. The Union Jack, a particularly large one, fluttered gallantly from the bonnet of the car. Roche, thoroughly tired, wrapped himself in several rugs, and went sound asleep in the back of the car.

Entering the outskirts of the city, Sir Almeric slowed down.

"Where do you want me to leave you?" he asked.

"At the cathedral," said the Grand Duchess.

The answer was surprising ; but Sir Almeric swung the car into the main street which leads to the Palace Platz where the cathedral stands.

" But," he said, " I thought you said, or Mr. Roche said, something about investigating the Seven Deadly Sins ? "

" Exactly. That's why we're going to the cathedral."

" It's the last place I should have thought of looking for them. But of course you know best."

The Grand Duchess was silent for a moment. Then she burst into a sudden cackle of laughter.

" Do you suppose ? " she said. " Oh, damn it all, you can't really think that Mr. Roche and I are running any kind of rig—a night out among the cabarets, or—— I assure you I'm far too old."

" Not at all," said Sir Almeric politely. " Certainly not too old."

The Grand Duchess turned round in her seat.

" Mr. Roche," she said, " Sir Almeric thinks that you and I are out on a disreputable spree."

Roche, who was very sound asleep, merely snored.

" I never suggested such a thing," said Sir Almeric.

"If I did go in for that kind of thing," said the Grand Duchess—"I don't because I'm too old—but if I did, I wouldn't choose that young man for my companion. Why,"—she bent over towards Sir Almeric and whispered in his ear—"he actually blushes at the merest suggestion of any impropriety."

"So do I," said Sir Almeric, "always."

"Then why did you say that Mr. Roche and I are here for a night out?" said the Grand Duchess.

"I didn't say so. All I said was that a cathedral didn't seem to me to be the natural place to look for the Seven Deadly Sins."

"It's the pictures of them we want," said the Grand Duchess, "not the sins themselves."

The car drew up at the north porch of the cathedral. Roche was awakened and staggered out.

"I wish I could go with you," said Sir Almeric, "but perhaps I'd better not. I'd love to know what you're going to do with those pictures."

"You stay here and wait for us," said the Grand Duchess. "Come on, Mr. Roche."

CHAPTER V

THE Grand Duchess and Roche entered the cathedral through the door of the north transept. It was pitch dark inside, dark as it never is in the open air. Each cautious step was an adventure. Roche walked with hands outstretched before his face. But the Grand Duchess had foreseen the darkness. While Roche moved slowly forward, she drew a candle and matches from the pocket of one of her skirts. A spurt of flame, which almost died and then burned clear, revealed pillars, pavement, dim outlines of windows, heavy black shadows near at hand, dim shadows fading into utter blackness up above.

Roche stood still, awed by the vast unlighted spaces round him, troubled by a queer sense of spiritual presences. He was recalled to the commonplace by the Grand Duchess's voice close to him.

"Damn," she said loudly.

She at least was troubled by no fear of such spiritual presences as might haunt a cathedral. Perhaps she was too well accustomed to spirits in ordinary life—spirits in amber beads, for instance—to worry about them either in the dark or the light.

"I've left the tools on the bicycle," she said.

"Tools!" said Roche.

"We've got to break down part of a wall," said the Grand Duchess. "At least I expect we have. We can't do it with our hands." Then a plan came to her. "Go back to Sir Almeric. Get him to lend you all the tools in his car. They'll be better than nothing. I'll wait for you here."

Roche did as he was told. Sir Almeric fumbled in his tool box, drew out wrenches, spanners, pliers, screw-drivers, a light hammer, a set of tyre levers, some spare sparking plugs, a couple of oilcans. He spread them out on the pavement.

"I'd love to know what you're going to do," he said, "but I'd better not inquire. As long as I'm in a position to say that I really don't know what the Grand Duchess went into the cathedral for I'm fairly safe, even if there are inquiries afterwards. Notes from the F.O. are such a nuisance. At present it's open to me to suppose that she simply wants to say her prayers. After all, that's the natural thing to do in a cathedral."

He looked doubtfully at the tools which he had laid out.

Churches have invented various aids to prayer. Counting beads, for instance, is sup-

posed by some to help. Wailing like a dog in pain on a note too high for comfort is regarded by others as promoting devotion. Gentlemen of an old school, now passed away, found the aid they needed by gazing into the linings of their hats. But does anyone pray with spanners and oilcans? Sir Almeric thought it unlikely, though he would willingly have admitted that he knew little or nothing about the practices of the Dravidian Church.

"I'm afraid," said Roche, smiling, "that praying is about the last thing that old lady is thinking of."

"Don't tell me so," said Sir Almeric. "Leave me my illusions. They'll be useful to me afterwards. I shall say, yes, I shall certainly say that the Grand Duchess went into the cathedral to pray for deliverance from the Seven Deadly Sins."

Roche gathered up the tools, leaving behind him nothing but the oilcans.

"Do you think," said Sir Almeric confidentially, "that she's a little mad?"

"As mad as a March hare," said Roche, "in some ways. In other ways as sane as you or I."

"She might easily be much saner than either of us," said Sir Almeric. "If I were sane, I shouldn't be here with my car, risking my reputation and my whole diplomatic future by aiding

and abetting a lunatic who wants to assassinate Gyorgy. If you were sane you wouldn't trust yourself in a dark cathedral with her."

"I don't suppose she'll murder me," said Roche.

"It may be a great deal worse for you afterwards, if she murders Gyorgy. The only comfort is that he's not the least likely to be in the cathedral. That's the last place in the world to look for him."

Roche slipped back into the cathedral with his armful of tools. He found the Grand Duchess crouching behind one of the pillars of the transept. She had set down her candle on the pavement, and was shading the flame carefully with her hands. Barely a glimmer of light escaped, no more than just enough to guide Roche to her. When he reached her side she blew the candle out.

"Listen," she whispered.

From the west end of the cathedral, very far off as it seemed, came the sound of metal striking stone. The blows were not very vigorous. They made no more than a faint clanging in the great dark space. The Grand Duchess seized Roche, her long bony fingers closing on his wrist with fierce energy. She dragged him along through the darkness until they stood at the end of the nave, facing westwards. Far away, high

up on the west wall, was a glimmer of light, and the sound of the blows struck on the stone came to them more clearly.

They moved quickly down the nave, too quickly for comfort or safety. They ran into all sorts of things—tables, packing-cases, hampers—left by the confederated house decorators. *Prie-Dieux*, broken chairs, kneeling stools, relics of the old days when pious congregations came to worship. They made a good deal of noise, and the Grand Duchess swore repeatedly. But the light on the wall never moved. The sound of hammering only stopped once, when Roche fell and dropped his tools with a clang. That seemed to disturb the worker on the west wall. But only for a short time. Soon he was hammering again.

At last they reached the scaffolding poles, and found their way among them to where the ladder stood. The Grand Duchess climbed first, stepping silently. When her head and shoulders were above the level of the rough platform made by the workmen she stopped and stared. Then she turned to Roche.

“There’s some one working at the pictures,” she said. “He’s working at them now. He’s at the last one.”

The dim light and her own excitement misled the Grand Duchess. Karl Gyorgy was working with such energy as was left to him, working

desperately with blistered hands and stiff muscles. But he had not reached the last picture. He was down on his hands and knees hammering and chipping at the stones beneath *Invidia*, the sixth sin. *Accedia*, the last of all, was still untouched.

The Grand Duchess hoisted herself on to the platform and crouched there. Roche mounted the remaining steps of the ladder and kneeled beside her. She pointed to the man who was working a few yards away.

"Karl Gyorgy," she said.

"Ah," said Roche. "What had we better do now?"

"Kill him of course," said the Grand Duchess.

She took one of the tyre levers from the pile of tools in Roche's arm, and he had little doubt that she meant to brain the unsuspecting man.

He protested in an agonized whisper.

"Don't do it," he said. "Don't."

"Why not?" said the Grand Duchess.

"He's a Jew."

"If he was Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses all rolled into one," said Roche, "it would be no reason for killing him."

But the Grand Duchess was very much of the opinion of Haman, the courtier of King Ahasuerus, who was minded to destroy the

whole race at once, thereby solving at a single stroke a problem which has vexed a lot of people, especially Hungarians, ever since. In the Grand Duchess's opinion, just as in his, a Jew ought to be killed, simply because he is a Jew.

Grasping the tyre lever firmly, she moved forward with stealthy steps. Roche grabbed at her and let fall the rest of his armful of tools. They clattered and clanged. The noise reverberated among the pillars and arches. Karl Gyorgy was startled. He stood up and looked round.

He recognized the Grand Duchess at once. Hers was a face which it was not easy for anyone to forget who had seen her in the last few years. Her twisted mouth and updrawn cheek left a vivid impression. Gyorgy dropped the hammer with which he had been working and gave a sudden cry of fear.

The Grand Duchess struggled to get at him, but Roche held her back.

"How—how did you get here?" stammered Gyorgy.

He had been kept informed all day of the news from the frontier. He knew that no battle had taken place, that no dash had been made to Csaka, that the invading army lay passive on the far side of the frontier. He was in a cold sweat of terror, but his brain still worked. He thought

that the Grand Duchess must have slipped through the lines of the Red Army, disguised perhaps. He was full of bitterness at the thought of the carelessness and slack discipline which had made such an evasion possible. He cursed his own army : the men, the officers, and the French military adviser.

Roche held tight to the Grand Duchess.

"What's the use of killing the beast?" he said. "Let's get the crown and clear out of this as quick as we can."

At the mention of the crown Gyorgy's fears seemed to leave him. He broke out into a torrent of violent and blasphemous assertions, that never, never should the Grand Duchess touch the crown. He would be—there was no horrible thing that he would not be—before he would allow her to put her hands on it.

The Grand Duchess laughed, heartily, almost without bitterness. To see Gyorgy writhing in agonized anticipation of her victory, to hear him uttering recondite blasphemies, this was the kind of joke she thoroughly appreciated. On Roche, with his British sense of humour, the effect of the man's foulness was different. He let go the Grand Duchess and struck Gyorgy sharply across the mouth with the back of his hand. Gyorgy cowered like a whipped dog.

"Keep your mouth shut," said Roche, "and

don't dare to stir hand or foot till I give you leave."

Then he and the Grand Duchess set to work on the stones above the picture of the white slug which represented *Accedia*. The Grand Duchess had a screwdriver and a heavy spanner. Roche picked up Gyorgy's chisel and hammer.

Their task was easy, much easier than Gyorgy's had been, for the stones they worked at had been moved before. It was not very difficult to loosen them again. But Roche could only give half his attention to what he was doing. He had to keep some sort of watch on Gyorgy, whom he thought capable of any treachery, who would certainly escape if he could.

But Gyorgy had not courage either for an attack or a dash for liberty. After whining helplessly for awhile he pulled himself together and tried to make a bargain with the Grand Duchess. He offered to restore her Dravidian estates to her, to share the price of the emeralds in the crown with her. The Grand Duchess hammered away at her stone without replying to him. He offered her a large pension, payable from the revenues of Dravidia. He offered to make her a member of the Republican Government, to give her high office and real power. The Grand Duchess worked away grimly. The stones were loosened. Roche dragged one of them from its

place. Gyorgy's offers rose in a *crescendo* of appeal.

"Let me have the crown," he said, "and when I'm King of Dravidia you shall be Queen, and we'll reign together."

"Do I understand that you're offering to marry me?" said the Grand Duchess.

She plunged her hands into the loose rubble behind the stones, and drew out the brass-bound box which contained the crown of Dravidia. Gyorgy saw it.

"Yes, yes," he said. "I'll do anything. I'll marry you if you like."

The Grand Duchess handed the box to Roche and picked up the tyre lever again.

"After that," she said, "I suppose you'll have no objection to my killing him?"

But Roche still had scruples.

"I'd rather you didn't," he said, "though I admit he deserves it. We promised Sir Almeric that we 'wouldn't.'"

"I promised nothing," said the Grand Duchess waving the tyre lever.

"But I did," said Roche, "and—— Don't you think you ought to respect my feelings?"

"If you ask it as a personal favour——"

"I do. That's exactly the way I put it. As a personal favour to me, in recognition of the

good turn I did you in finding out the meaning of Saligia, I ask you——”

“Very well,” said the Grand Duchess, “he can go on living till the next time I meet him.”

She took the brass-bound box from Roche. They climbed down the ladder. By the light of Gyorgy’s lantern which they took with them, they picked their way along the nave and among the pillars of the transept. The key of the door was in the lock. Roche turned it on the outside and slipped it into his pocket.

“It’s safer,” he said, “to have that fellow locked up till we’re out of this.”

CHAPTER VI

THE car slipped swiftly through the streets of Csaka and out to the road beyond the town. The Grand Duchess sat by Sir Almeric with the precious box on her lap. She patted it with her hands and crooned over it as if it had been a lost babe wonderfully found again. Roche, crouching down into shelter behind, lit his pipe, and sucked it contentedly.

The sound of the cathedral bell, a heavy tolling, floated to them from the town.

"What's that?" said Sir Almeric. "It sounds like a church bell."

"The cathedral bell," said the Grand Duchess.

"I've never heard it rung before," said Sir Almeric, "though I've been nearly two years in Csaka. I wonder who's ringing it?"

"I expect it's Karl Gyorgy," said the Grand Duchess with a dry cackle.

"Karl Gyorgy," said Sir Almeric, "summoning the faithful to a midnight mass. This is an odd country, and queer things happen in it. But I shouldn't have thought that Karl Gyorgy of all men would——"

"He's summoning his police to let him out," said the Grand Duchess.

"The fact is," said Roche leaning forward, "that we locked him up in the cathedral."

"Instead of killing him," said the Grand Duchess. "Mr. Roche seemed to think you'd rather he wasn't killed."

"I'd much rather he was killed," said Sir Almeric. "All I dislike is being mixed up with the killing. Unfortunately, your having imprisoned him is likely to be very nearly as awkward for me."

"We had to do something with him," said Roche apologetically.

"Still, it does put me in a difficult position," said Sir Almeric.

He drove on in silence for awhile, wondering what excuse he could offer to the Foreign Office for his share in kidnapping one of the principal Ministers of a friendly state. He reached a decision some five miles farther on. Without saying a word to the Grand Duchess, he swung the car sharply to the left, increased his speed, and went bumping up a very bad side road.

"Where are you going?" said the Grand Duchess. "This isn't the way to the marshes."

"I'm not going to the marshes," said Sir Almeric. "I'm going to a place called Warwitz."

"That's miles away to the north," said the Grand Duchess, who knew her native country. "It's right in the heart of the mountains. What do you want to go there for?"

"To shoot bears," said Sir Almeric.

The Grand Duchess made no protest. She did not care much where she went so long as she was able to take the crown with her. Roche had no particular wish to visit the marshes again. His recollection of them was far from pleasant. But he was curious about the reasons for the sudden change of plan.

Sir Almeric stopped the car, got down and removed the Union Jack from its place on the bonnet.

"Rather too conspicuous," he said.

Then he covered up the number plates of the car, wrapping his muffler round one and knotting a pocket-handkerchief over the other.

"I don't suppose many people in these parts can read," he said, "but it's as well to be on the safe side."

He took his seat and drove on again, making a wide sweep round Csaka, and striking the high-road some miles north of the city at the very spot where he had left it two days before.

"I hate to allow that ruffian Gyorgy to think that he fooled me over those bears. But I'm afraid I must," said Sir Almeric. "There's nothing else for it."

The Grand Duchess, gloating over her box, was not listening to him. Roche, leaning forward eagerly, was. It was to him that Sir Almeric made his explanation.

"It would have been all right," he said, "if we could have slipped in and out of Csaka without being noticed. Nothing need ever have been known about my being there. But you locked up Gyorgy, so there's bound to be a fuss."

"I couldn't help it," said Roche. "It was as much as I could do to save his life."

"Still," said Sir Almeric, "there'll be a fuss and all sorts of questions will be asked. If it comes out that I drove the Grand Duchess into Csaka, it will be devilish awkward for me. In

fact, I shall be hoofed out of my job. The Foreign Office would never see my action in a proper light."

"I'm extremely sorry," said Roche. "The last thing I want is to get you into any sort of trouble. And I'm sure the Grand Duchess——"

He looked at her, but she was too much absorbed with her box to pay any attention to him. She was trying the lock with some keys, none of which fitted. Sir Almeric waved the apology aside.

"So the only thing for me to do," he said, "is to establish an alibi. That's why I'm going to Warwitz. Gyorgy has every reason to suppose I'm there now. I promised to go. I actually started off in that direction. So if I'm found there when the row begins I'll have a pretty good line of defence. Of course, I'll have to produce a few dead bears. I told you about that cad Gyorgy and the packs of howling bears, didn't I?"

"No."

Sir Almeric told the story of Karl Gyorgy's plan for getting him out of Csaka.

"I didn't know at the time," he said, "why he wanted to get rid of me. But I see now that he must have been expecting the Grand Duchess. And if I'd been there when she arrived, he wouldn't have been able to shoot her."

"I'd have shot him if there had been any shooting done," said the Grand Duchess, waking suddenly to attention.

"I dare say," said Sir Almeric, "but he naturally thought he would shoot you, having a whole army to help him. So in order to get rid of me he told me that bear story. It was that," he added confidentially, "that got my back up and made me keen on helping you two with your little ramp. I hate being treated like a fool, especially in anything to do with sport."

"I see," said Roche. "Well, I've no objection to going to Warwitz, wherever it is. I suppose we'll get out of it some time or other."

"Oh, you'll get out all right," said Sir Almeric. "I'll run you down somewhere near the frontier in my car if I can. The only real difficulty I see before us is the bears. I'll have to kill a few somehow, or Gyorgy won't believe I've really been hunting them. And I don't see how I'm to do it, for I haven't got a gun with me. I never thought I'd want one when I only meant to run you and the Grand Duchess into Csaka."

"I've a revolver," said Roche. "Will that be any use?"

"I've never shot bears with a revolver," said Sir Almeric. "But I suppose it might be done. I don't see why not. Anyhow, we'll try."

Sir Almeric drove fast along the north road

when he reached it. They sped through sleeping villages, passed dark lonely houses, saw the early dawn spread grey across the sky, watched the light gathering in the east and the sudden glory of the sunrise. Beasts began to move among the fields. The doors of cottages opened. Men appeared, slouching out for their day's work on the land. Children ran out on to the village streets, pursued by the shrill cries of their mothers.

At about nine o'clock they came on a large, scattered village, where low, white houses stood on each side of broad roadways. In the middle of it was an inn. A woman, with a grey handkerchief tied over her head, was scrubbing rough tables on the veranda. At the door, watching her, was a heavy man who smoked a long pipe.

Sir Almeric stopped his car and hailed in German, asking for breakfast.

It was the man, evidently the landlord, who replied. The travellers could have coffee, yes.

One of the tables on the veranda was dried. A rough bench was set beside it. The woman who had been scrubbing went indoors. After awhile she and the landlord reappeared with glass tumblers full of black coffee. Sir Almeric demanded milk, sugar, bread, butter, eggs. The landlord shook his head. He had no such things, neither milk nor bread nor eggs. Sir Almeric

smelt and then tasted the coffee. It was made of burnt acorns, as coffee generally is in countries made safe for democracy by Communist Governments.

Sir Almeric said angrily that bread must be produced. The landlord took refuge in a pretence that he did not understand German. That availed him nothing. The Grand Duchess tackled him in his own language. She talked for nearly twenty minutes. The landlord's face, sullen and obstinate at first, gradually cleared. In the end he actually smiled and went back into the house.

"That's all right," said the Grand Duchess. "I explained to him who we are."

"Not, I trust, who I am," said Sir Almeric.

"Oh no," said the Grand Duchess. "I should have said that I explained to him who we're not. He thought we were Government inspectors coming round to collect food. That's why he said he hadn't got any."

"But has he?" said Roche, who was very hungry. "That's the real point. Has he?"

The landlord answered that question. He and his scrubbing maid appeared with large loaves, a block of yellow butter, and a great jug of milk. A few minutes later came a dish of boiled eggs.

"Try him for some decent coffee," said Sir Almeric.

But that, it seemed, really was impossible. Coffee cannot be grown in Dravidia, and imports—— With a currency like the Dravidian, there can be no imports. The landlord suggested beer, and brought it, foaming, in thick glass mugs.

When breakfast was over the Grand Duchess had another long talk with the landlord.

“I’ve told him,” she explained, “to summon the chief men of the village, all of them.”

“What on earth for?” said Sir Almeric. “We ought to get on as soon as ever we can. Any sort of demonstration of welcome will be extremely inconvenient. It’ll get into the papers, and then there’ll be questions asked. I’m supposed to be in Warwitz at this moment.”

“The villagers,” said the Grand Duchess, “must swear allegiance.”

“If it’s to me,” said Sir Almeric, “I don’t want them to in the least. If it’s to you, I wish you’d put it off for a day or two. I can’t possibly take part in any ceremony of the sort. My position makes it impossible.”

“They will swear allegiance,” said the Grand Duchess, “not to me but to the Dravidian Crown.”

Sir Almeric protested, argued, pleaded. The Grand Duchess was firm. She explained the peculiar veneration in which the crown was re-

garded in Dravidia. Sir Almeric had heard about that before and was not consoled. If the Grand Duchess really had the crown in her brass-bound box, that only made things worse. He saw himself committed to an act of open insurrection, the setting up of a rival Government. Karl Gyorgy and his associates were half-recognized by Great Britain, under a commercial agreement. He could not possibly assist in establishing a rival authority. The Grand Duchess assured him that there was no reason for nervousness. The Government of the Crown would in a few days be the only Government in Dravidia. Sir Almeric would get praise and not blame for being the first to recognize it.

Sir Almeric thought otherwise ; but arguing with the Grand Duchess was vain. He saw nothing for it but to drive away, leaving her to settle affairs in her own way between the villagers and the crown.

But it was not easy to get away. The head men of the village were arriving in considerable numbers. The veranda was already crowded with them. They had put on their festival clothes, embroidered jackets, tall black hats with feathers in them, short cloaks with pendent ribbons, long black boots. The Mayor headed them in his robes of office, a white petticoat, pleated and starched so that it stood out round

him, a black jacket, an enormous white tie with streaming ends.

"Stay and see it out," said Roche. "I don't suppose anything serious will come of it."

The Grand Duchess, bearing her box in her hand, went into the inn. The landlord followed her with a chisel and a hatchet. Her keys had failed her. She meant to break open the box.

Sir Almeric hesitated. The scene was becoming very picturesque. Women and children most gorgeously arrayed swarmed on the road below the veranda.

"All that talk about the crown," said Roche, "must be rot. No people could believe what the Grand Duchess says."

Sir Almeric was not so sure about that. In the course of his shooting expeditions he had learned a good deal about the Dravidians. They were capable of believing anything, except the simple maxims which used to serve as copy-book headlines in England. No citizen of a Balkan state can ever be convinced, for instance, that honesty is the best policy; but he believes without the slightest difficulty that magical powers inhere in crowns, rings, amber beads, or sacred pictures.

The town band appeared at the far end of the street, stepping gallantly forward in time

to one of its own tunes. Sir Almeric hesitated.

"Do you think she's really got the crown?" he asked.

"I believe she has," said Roche.

He had no time to tell the story then. The voice of the Grand Duchess came to them from the inn, summoning them.

"Well," said Sir Almeric resignedly, "I may as well go through with it. After all, it isn't every day one comes in for a show of this sort. And if it's the beginning of a counter-revolution I shan't grieve. That fellow Gyorgy is an utter swine."

They found the Grand Duchess in what seemed to be the taproom of the inn. She was standing beside a beer-stained table. Behind her, chisel and hammer in hand, stood the landlord. He had forced the lock of the box, and looked hot. The Grand Duchess's hands rested lightly on the lid. She looked as if she were engaged in some ecstatic religious rite—a laying on of hands, an act of consecration—a particularly solemn benediction.

She sent the landlord out of the room.

Then she made a speech to Sir Almeric and Roche, a formal speech in language which would have been suitable in a pulpit or a House of Lords, where a resolution to which no one objects is being proposed.

"I have sent for you," she said, "because you are friends of my beloved country. You,"—she addressed Roche—"have endured much in her cause."

Roche bowed. He had endured a good deal with the tandem bicycle in the bog.

"You,"—she spoke directly to Sir Almeric—"have come to our aid at a moment when help was badly needed."

"Oh, that's nothing," said Sir Almeric. "Couldn't do less than offer you a seat in my car."

"Also," said the Grand Duchess, "I have desired that you two, first of all, should look upon the sacred crown of Dravidia, now to be restored to the suffering people, because you are English gentlemen."

"Irish," murmured Roche. "I'm Irish."

"I wish you to be the first to see the restoration to Dravidia of peace and order, justice, truth, liberty, the gladness of life to simple men, the splendour of the old days of chivalry and honour, all, all that the crown will bring. It is fitting that you should be the first to greet the dawn of this bright day, because you are English gentlemen, and therefore men of faith and chivalry, lovers of liberty and justice——"

"More or less," said Sir Almeric, who was

becoming a little embarrassed. "Hardly quite all that."

"You are patterns to the world of true nobility," said the Grand Duchess, "because your word is trusted, because your honour is unstained."

She looked straight at Sir Almeric.

"It's awfully nice of you to say so," he murmured. "And of course we do—not quite all that—but we do more or less try to play the game. All I mean to say is, there are things which aren't done."

"Therefore," said the Grand Duchess, "behold the sunrise of the day of the resurrection of Dravidia."

She opened the brass-bound box with a fine gesture.

There, on a bed of purple velvet, lay a wide circle of gold—the sacred crown of Dravidia.

With reverent hands the Grand Duchess lifted it from the box. Her eyes were full of mystical devotion. They were fixed on the crown as she slowly raised it.

The band outside began to play the old Dravidian royalist national anthem.

CHAPTER VII

THE Grand Duchess gave a sudden gasping cry. Her hands and arms stiffened, then quivered, grew weak, relaxed. The crown fell with a clatter and rolled to the feet of Sir Almeric. The Grand Duchess made two tottering steps forward and then collapsed, crumpled up on the ground.

"What's the matter with her?" said Sir Almeric.

Roche kneeled down, and bent over the Grand Duchess.

"Fainted," he said, "or—— No, she's not fainted. Hysterical, I'm afraid."

"Excitement too much for her," said Sir Almeric.

Roche raised her head, and fanned her face, inefficiently, with his hand.

Sir Almeric picked up the crown and looked at it curiously.

"The emeralds are gone," he said.

Like most other people, he had heard of the priceless emeralds in the Dravidian crown. They were there no longer. There were holes where the stones had been, and jagged edges of torn gold which showed how they had been wrenched from their setting. But

not a single one of the famous stones was left.

"Looted," said Sir Almeric. "Now, I wonder who did it?"

The Grand Duchess, perhaps revived by Roche's fanning, sat up.

"Karl Gyorgy," she said.

Then, slowly and with difficulty, she struggled to her feet. Roche stood beside her ready to catch her if she fell again. But there was no need for that. Her strength came back to her. She stood steadily, and for more than ten minutes, neither hesitating nor pausing, she cursed Karl Gyorgy with terrifying intensity.

There is a great passage in the 28th chapter of Deuteronomy, more than fifty verses of unbroken malediction, evidently the work of a man who had studied the art of cursing, bearing evidence of great literary skill and of a trained imagination. Speaking *ex tempore*, without an attempt at revision or correction, the Grand Duchess did better, was more comprehensive, more completely blighting, than Moses, or whoever the author of Deuteronomy was, succeeded in being.

Sir Almeric and Roche stood bewildered and helpless, as men on whom an unexpected, very violent storm descends. Under the ferocity of the Grand Duchess's malediction they bowed their heads as if they feared that the words,

like physical missiles, would hit and bruise them. It was Roche who recovered himself first. He broke in on the Grand Duchess's tirade with an assertion that Karl Gyorgy had not stolen the emeralds. At first she would not listen to him, or perhaps did not hear him ; but Roche went on giving reason after reason to show that whoever took the stones it could not have been Gyorgy. In the end the obvious truth of what he said laid hold on the Grand Duchess's mind. Even to her it was plain that the terrified, hysterical creature whom they had left in the cathedral could not be the thief.

She stopped cursing him, and stood for a moment in thought.

"It must have been the Archimandrite," she said.

"Surely not," said Sir Almeric; "the Archimandrite always struck me as a nice old boy. I can't think that he——"

"It must have been the Archimandrite," said the Grand Duchess, "for no one else had access to the crown."

Then she cursed the Archimandrite.

The Dravidian Church has an office of major ex-communication which is admitted by all liturgiologists to be the finest in Europe. It is seldom used. The Archimandrite during his whole long tenure of office only had occasion

to use it twice. Both times he spent the next day in bed, recovering from the nervous prostration produced by the utterance of such terrific words. That commination was mere pap, soppy, sweetened, tepid pap, compared to the things the Grand Duchess said. Yet she did not repeat one single phrase which she had used about Karl Gyorgy. In dealing with him she had, quite appropriately, taken a Hebrew model and cursed the Jew as one of his own race might have done it. When she came to the Archimandrite her style, though no less vigorous, was Christian.

This time it was Sir Almeric who succeeded in stopping her.

"Don't you think," he said, "we'd better send the village people home again, tell them the show's off for to-day, or something?"

It was indeed necessary to do something about the crowd outside. They had picked up the national anthem from the band and shouted themselves hoarse over it. Having become too hoarse to shout any more, they were growing impatient. The Grand Duchess had sense enough left to see that they must be got rid of.

"Send them away," she said to Sir Almeric.

It is not an easy thing to disperse a crowd which has come together, dressed in gala clothes,

with the expectation of pleasurable excitement. But Sir Almeric managed it, by a method which never fails in Eastern Europe. He paid.

The Mayor got two English pounds, and was so much pleased that his pleated white petticoat quivered from waist to hem. The leader of the band got a pound, and blew blasts of joy on his instrument until Sir Almeric stopped him. The innkeeper, evidently a man of great importance, got a pound. It was made clear to all of them by signs that the whole company must at once withdraw to the farthest corner of the village. In five minutes they were on the move. The band went first, playing an uncertain version of "God Save the King" in honour of Sir Almeric. The Mayor followed, his petticoats swinging like a highlander's kilt as he strode along. The people, men, women and children, fell in behind. Sir Almeric went back to the taproom.

He found the Grand Duchess perfectly calm and apparently cheerful again. She was putting the crown back into its box. Roche had managed to secure a large jug of beer and some glasses. Sir Almeric helped himself and drank eagerly.

"It wouldn't have been any good," said the Grand Duchess, "showing the people the crown without the emeralds. They'd have

seen at once that they weren't there, damn that Archimandrite."

"I suppose," said Sir Almeric, "that the crown loses its—its peculiar sanctity now?"

"The crown will be as good as ever," said the Grand Duchess, "when I've had some more emeralds set in it. I shall take it to Budapest and get that done at once."

"But," said Sir Almeric, "the Dravidian emeralds were unique. There aren't any more like them."

"Of course," said the Grand Duchess, "I can't get real emeralds. I couldn't pay for them even if they were to be had. I shall put in substitutes."

"Do you mean to say," said Sir Almeric, "that you're going to palm off faked stones— But that would hardly do, would it?"

"I don't see why not," said the Grand Duchess. "No one will want to test the stones in the crown. I'd take jolly good care nobody got the chance."

"That's not exactly my point," said Sir Almeric.

"The Dravidians are a simple people," said the Grand Duchess. "They won't ask questions."

"The simpler they are the worse it seems to—— But of course it's your affair, not mine."

“What the hell are you talking about?” said the Grand Duchess.

“I’ve no earthly right to interfere,” said Sir Almeric, “and I don’t want to. But still—— What do you say, Roche?”

“Seems to me,” said Roche, “to be playing it a bit low down on the child-like Dravidian.”

“Exactly my feeling,” said Sir Almeric. “But, of course, as I said, it’s no business of mine.”

“In a matter of religious faith——” said Roche. “It really seems to be a kind of religious faith——”

“To palm off a fake——” said Sir Almeric.

“I suppose,” said Roche, “it might be called pious fraud.”

“Can’t stand pious frauds,” said Sir Almeric, “never could. But don’t let anything I say influence you.”

“Is this one of your English jokes?” said the Grand Duchess.

“No, it’s not,” said Sir Almeric. “Is it, Roche?”

“Not at all,” said Roche. “It’s just—— But I hate pushing forward my opinion.”

“But I want your opinion,” said the Grand Duchess, stamping her foot, “both your opinions.”

“It seems to me,” said Sir Almeric, “one

of those things that a fellow doesn't do. No harm in it I dare say, but all the same—— What do you say, Roche? "

" Oh, not the least harm in it," said Roche. " But——"

" Just, it isn't done," said Sir Almeric.

The Grand Duchess thought for a moment. Then she said :

" I suppose if I put in those sham emeralds and then claim the people's loyalty to the crown, you'll refuse to shake hands with me afterwards. Is that what you mean? "

" Oh, come now," said Sir Almeric. " I never said that. Of course I'll shake hands with you. So will Roche. Won't you, Roche? "

" Of course," said Roche.

" As a matter of fact," said Sir Almeric, " in my position I have to shake hands with all kinds of people. Why, I've shaken hands with Karl Gyorgy scores of times."

" If you ever shake hands with me like that," said the Grand Duchess, " I'll kill you."

Then there was a long and uncomfortable silence. Roche concealed his embarrassment by filling and lighting his pipe. Sir Almeric finished the beer in his mug, and looked for more. There was a little left in Roche's mug. He drank it.

Then the Grand Duchess held out her hands, one to each of the two men.

"You are English gentlemen," she said.

Roche took her hand. It was the left which came to him, and murmured his usual protest:

"Irish, absolutely Irish."

"And that," said the Grand Duchess, feeling about for Sir Almeric's hand, "is the proudest title a man can bear. Honour and chivalry, nobility of mind——"

"I wish," said Sir Almeric, "that you wouldn't say that again. It's trying, you know, very trying."

"But I want to explain to you," said the Grand Duchess, "why I am not going to put imitation emeralds into the crown."

"Oh, you're not, aren't you?" said Sir Almeric.

"No," said the Grand Duchess. "I'm not, because I now know how an English gentleman feels. An English gentleman——"

"Don't say all that again," said Sir Almeric. "I can't stand it, I really can't."

The Grand Duchess had firm hold of his hand and he could not pull it away.

"You are men of faith and honour——" said the Grand Duchess.

"No, we're not," said Sir Almeric. "Hang

it all, we're not that sort at all, not in the very least."

"Uprightness, truth, spotless chivalry. The whole world says it."

"The whole world's an ass then," said Sir Almeric. "There's nothing in it, you know. Only just if a thing is the kind of thing that isn't done, naturally a fellow doesn't do it. That's all. Let's have some more beer. Where did you get that beer, Roche?"

The Grand Duchess released his hands and sat down again.

"Right-o," she said. "More beer. Then we'll go off to Warwitz and shoot bears. Shooting bears is one of the things which is done."

"Not with a revolver," said Sir Almeric. "So far as I know it never has been done with a revolver. But we'll try."

“ BALLYSAX HOUSE, CO. KILDARE, *July 5.*

“ MY DEAR ROCHE,—

“ Are you in Dublin ? I send this letter to the College in hope it may find you and induce you to come down here for at least a short visit. A long visit will be still pleasanter for me. I want to hear all about your expedition to Csaka. I am interested, more than interested ; and such scraps of information as have appeared in the papers do little but whet my curiosity.

“ This comes from *The Times* of a week ago :

“ ‘ DRAVIDIAN FRONTIER CLOSED

“ ‘ It is reported from Bucharest, that owing to incidents which are still somewhat obscure, the frontier of Dravidia has been strictly closed.’

“ Are you and my Aunt Olga responsible for those incidents ? If so, I beg of you not to leave them ‘ still somewhat obscure,’ at least to me.

“ This is from *The Morning Post* of the day before yesterday :

“ ‘ REPORTED RESIGNATION OF SIR ALMERIC CLOOTE

“ ‘ It is reported that Sir Almeric Cloote, British High Commissioner in Dravidia, is retiring, owing to ill-health.’

“ I knew Cloote well at one time, a thorough sportsman, and I don’t believe he is suffering from ill-health. Surely he was not fool enough to mix himself up in any way with Aunt Olga ?

“ To-day I am stirred to the bottom of my soul and driven nearly frantic with curiosity by the following announcement in *The Daily Mail* :

“ ‘ ROYAL LADY TAKES THE VEIL

“ ‘ The Grand Duchess Olga of Dravidia is shortly to be received into the Convent of the Hagia Sophrosyne.’

“ Can this possibly be true ? I used to visit the Hagia Sophrosyne ladies in the old days, a quiet, dignified community of charitable women, a little inclined to quarrel with the Archimandrite over questions of church discipline, but perfectly charming in their own house. I can’t help feeling sorry for them if the *Daily Mail* correspondent is well informed,

and of course I'm burning to know what can possibly have induced Aunt Olga to take such a step. Did she fail to find the crown, or was it, as I always expected, a disappointment to her when she got it? Do come and tell me whether this news is really true. I need not say that it would be an immense relief to me if Aunt Olga retired from the world. I have lived in dread of her active spirit ever since I succeeded in leaving Dravidia.

"Here is another piece of news. Perhaps it has no connection with your buccaneering expedition, but I am so nervous that I seem to catch echoes of your footsteps everywhere.

" 'BOND STREET SHOP-LIFTING MYSTERY

" 'The Greek arrested yesterday on the charge of shop-lifting in one of the principal jewellery establishments in Bond Street, was found to be in possession of £39,000 in Bank of England notes. Police inquiries show that he cashed a cheque for this amount in the St. James' Street Branch of the London, City and Westminster Bank earlier in the day. He gives the name Kapsonidos.'

"There was a Kapsonidos, I remember the name perfectly, who wrote from Smyrna, offering to give my Government information about the Communist party in Csaka just before the

revolution. Is this the same man? Probably not. But do tell me if you know anything about him.

“ Finally I come on this note in to-day’s *Daily Express* :

“ ‘ ILLNESS OF COMMUNIST LEADER

“ ‘ Karl Gyorgy, the Communist leader in Dravidia, is suffering from a complete nervous breakdown, the result of overwork and anxiety. (Reuter.)

“ ‘ Our special correspondent in Budapest telegraphs: A sensational rumour is current here in well-informed circles that Karl Gyorgy is suffering from the effects of poison administered to him by some fanatical member of the Dravidian Legitimist party.’

“ Did Aunt Olga try to poison Gyorgy? If so, and if, as it appears, the attempt was not successful, I can quite understand her going into a convent. She would want to spend the rest of her life repenting—of her failure. I never liked Gyorgy myself. Aunt Olga hated him.

“ Yours very sincerely,

“ MICHAEL DONOVAN.

“ P.S.—Bad hexameters seem to spur you

to action. Here's one a shade worse than the Archimandrite's. Let it plead my cause.

"In Ballysaxam, Mi Roche, celerrime veni."

Roche received the letter. It was handed to him by a porter at the gate of the College on the morning of his arrival in Dublin.

He went down to County Kildare that evening, reaching Ballysax just in time for dinner. Afterwards, very comfortably over coffee and liqueurs, he answered the King's questions.

"I had not heard," he said, "of Sir Almeric's resignation. But I'm afraid it's very likely to be true. Indeed, I think that resignation is probably the wrong word."

"Sacked?" said the King.

"Almost sure to be."

"I'm sorry for that," said the King. "Very sorry. How did you drag him into it?"

"To explain that," said Roche, "I should have to begin at the beginning and tell the whole story."

"Before you do that just tell me this: Did you poison Gyorgy?"

"No, we didn't," said Roche. "If we'd done anything to him we'd have smashed his skull with a tyre lever. That's what the Grand Duchess wanted to do. But I stopped her."

"I suppose then," said the King, "that he's

not really ill, and the Reuter telegram simply lied about the nervous breakdown."

"I expect he's ill all right," said Roche, "and nervous breakdown is just what he's likely to be suffering from, if nervous breakdown means mania brought on by uncontrollable fury and disappointment. He was within a pip of getting the crown. If we'd been two hours later he'd have had it. What happened was this——"

"One moment," said the King. "Before you begin the story just relieve my feelings about Aunt Olga? Is she really going into a convent?"

"She told me so," said Roche. "We had a long talk about it before I left Budapest. I needn't say that I tried to head her off as well as I could."

"Why on earth did you do that?"

"Well, I didn't think the life would suit her. Mind you, I'm really fond of the Grand Duchess. I admire her in lots of ways, but there are things about her—her language for instance. I can't imagine the faces of the other nuns when she speaks out plainly, and she's sure to, sooner or later."

"Oh, that's nothing," said the King. "The Hagia Sophrosyne ladies are sensible women. They won't mind a damn or two. They often

say worse things themselves about the Archimandrite."

"She'll put plenty of pep into any fight they have with the Archimandrite," said Roche. "I don't suppose she'll ever forgive him for taking the emeralds out of the crown."

"Does she think he did that?"

"She's sure of it. He appears to be the only person who could have taken them."

The King poured himself out a fresh cup of coffee and drank it. He lit a cigarette. He drank a glass of brandy. Then he crossed the room to his writing table and took out of a drawer a small silver box.

"I suppose," he said to Roche, "that you mean to write to Aunt Olga?"

"She asked me to," said Roche, "and I said I would."

The King opened his little box and poured out before Roche a number of small, green stones. Roche stared at them.

"The emeralds," said the King.

"From the crown?"

"The famous emeralds," said the King, "from the sacred crown of Dravidia."

"So it was you who took them?"

"That's what I want you to tell Aunt Olga. It isn't fair to let the Archimandrite bear the blame when he knew nothing at all about it."

But for God's sake, Roche, don't tell her till she's taken her vows. If she isn't tied up and bound, irretrievably and hopelessly, she'll be over here after me to get those stones and start the whole miserable rag over again, plots, revolutions, restorations; and I'll never get another moment's peace."

"But——" said Roche. "Good Heavens, man, why did you let us go off on that wild goose chase when you knew all the time——"

"I couldn't stop you," said the King. "I warned you there'd be trouble. That's all I could do."

"You might have told us you had the emeralds."

"Hang it all," said the King, "be reasonable. If I'd told you that Aunt Olga would have been over here by the next train. She'd have teased me and bullied me and made general hell of my life till I gave them to her. Then, when she'd put them back into the crown she'd have insisted on my being king again. I couldn't face that. I really couldn't. You don't know what it's like being king of a country like Dravadia."

"I dare say it's pretty beastly," said Roche.

"Beastly. Beastly is not the word for it. There's no English word for it. It was just to prevent that happening that I took the

emeralds. I knew they couldn't make me king again—not even Aunt Olga could make me king without the crown. I was afraid to carry off the whole thing. The Archimandrite would have spotted me to a certainty, so I took the emeralds. I felt perfectly sure that the crown would be of no use without them.”

“And now,” said Roche, “you want me to tell the Grand Duchess.”

“Well,” said the King, “it's a bit of a risk. No matter what vows she takes she might break out again. Still, I'd like to be fair to the Archimandrite, and he isn't in the least to blame. I'll tell you what we'll do. As long as the Archimandrite is shut up Aunt Olga can't do much to him. I don't suppose she'll make any kind of public accusation. That would be playing into the hands of Gyorgy and giving him an excuse for persecuting the Church. We'll wait till the Archimandrite gets out and tell her then. I dare say that won't be for a year or two. By that time, if I know anything about her, she'll be Abbess of the Hagia Sophrosyne and will hardly want to go into politics again, though one can't be sure. As I said before, telling her at all is a bit of a risk. Still, I suppose we must.”

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